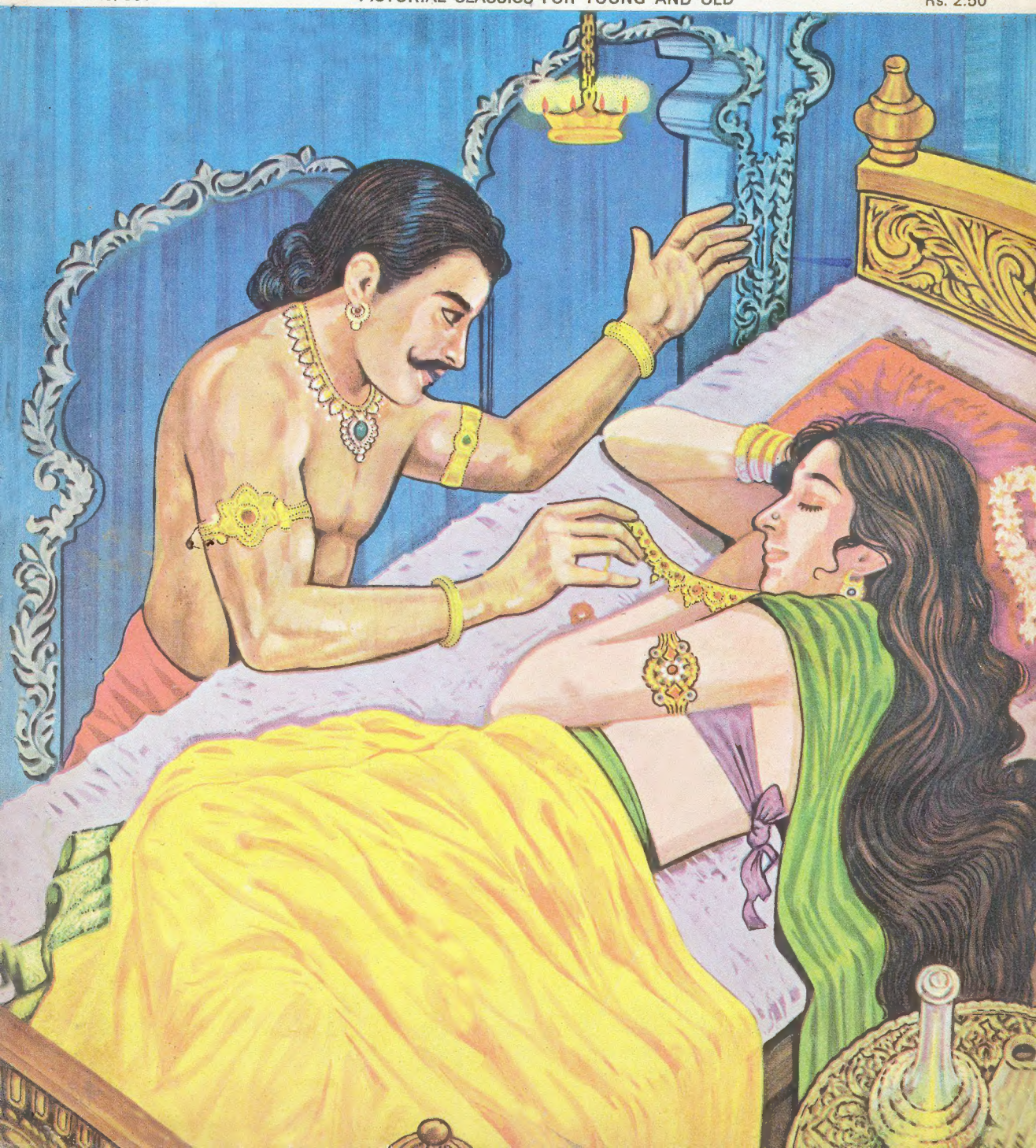
CHATURANG KATHA

Vetala Stories

PADMAVATI

No. 501 PICTORIAL CLASSICS FOR YOUNG AND OLD Rs. 2.50



CHATURANG KATHA

King Vikramaditya of Ujjaini had agreed to assist an exacting ascetic at certain midnight rituals of magic and necromancy. As a part of this, he had to fetch a *vetala* (a spirit or demon found usually inhabiting a corpse), observing strict silence all the while.

The gruesome task also turned out to be an extremely difficult one. The *vetala* turned out to be a story-teller who demanded an answer to riddles he posed at the end of every story. If the king kept silent, knowing the answer, the *vetala* would break his head into a thousand pieces. If he spoke, the *vetala* would fly back to his tree.

How Vikramaditya patiently answered the questions and how he ultimately won the favour of that very *vetala* go to make up the twenty-five stories of the *Vetala Panchavimshati,* many of which we will be presenting in our CHATURANG KATHA series.

These stories were originally written in Sanskrit some time between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries.

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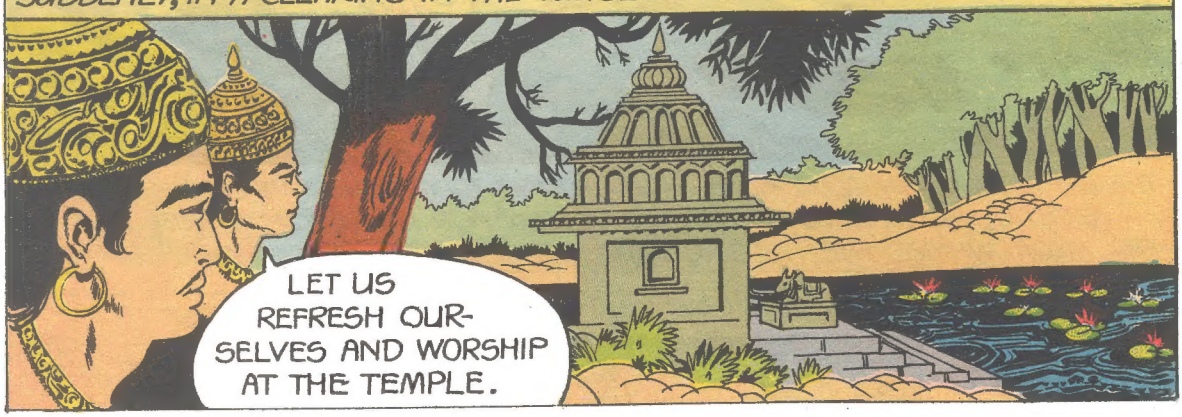
PADMAVATI

THE BRAVE, MAGNANIMOUS KING VIKRAMADITYA, TO OBLIGE ONE OF HIS SUBJECTS, AN ASCETIC, HAD AGREED TO FETCH A VETALA* FOR HIM FROM A TREE NOT FAR FROM WHERE THE ASCETIC INTENDED PERFORMING A SACRIFICE.

* A GHOST OR DEMON THAT USUALLY INHABITS A CORPSE

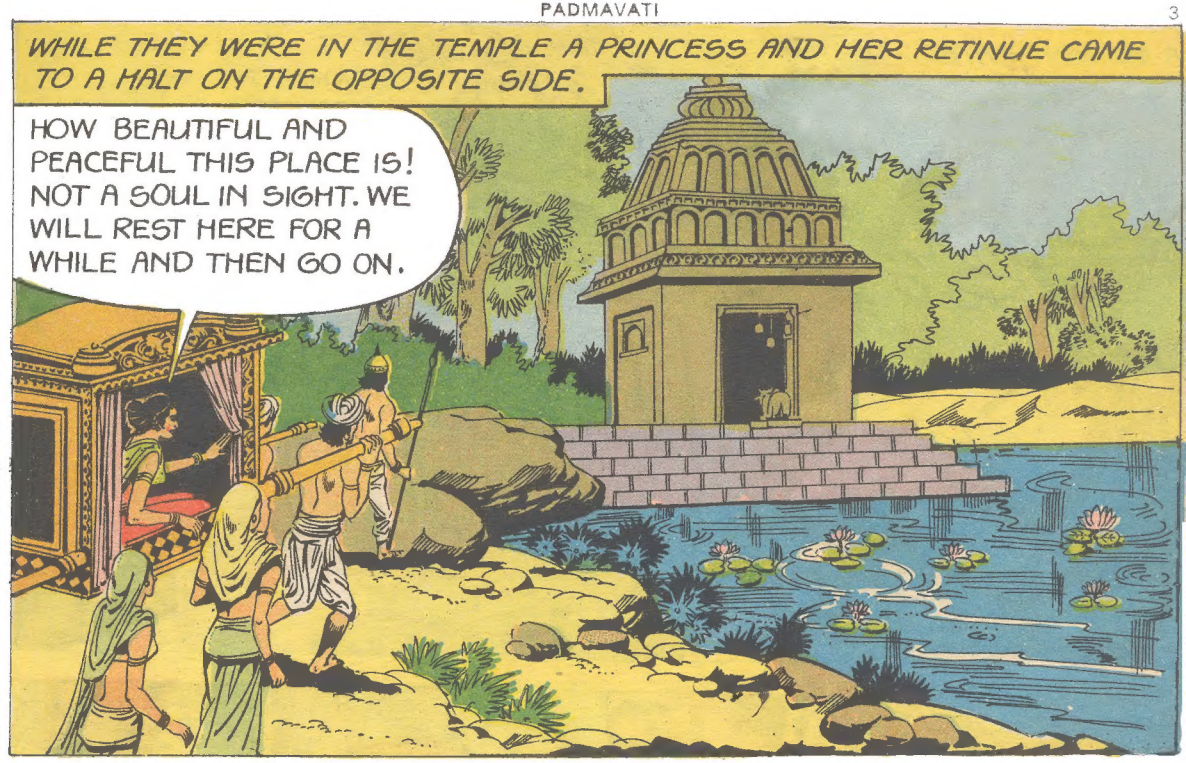
"PRINCE MUKUTA-SHEKHARA OF VARANASI WAS OUT ON A HUNT ONE DAY. HE WAS ACCOMPANIED BY HIS CLOSE COMPANION, THE MINISTER'S SON.

SUDDENLY, IN A CLEARING IN THE JUNGLE THEY CAME UPON A TANK.



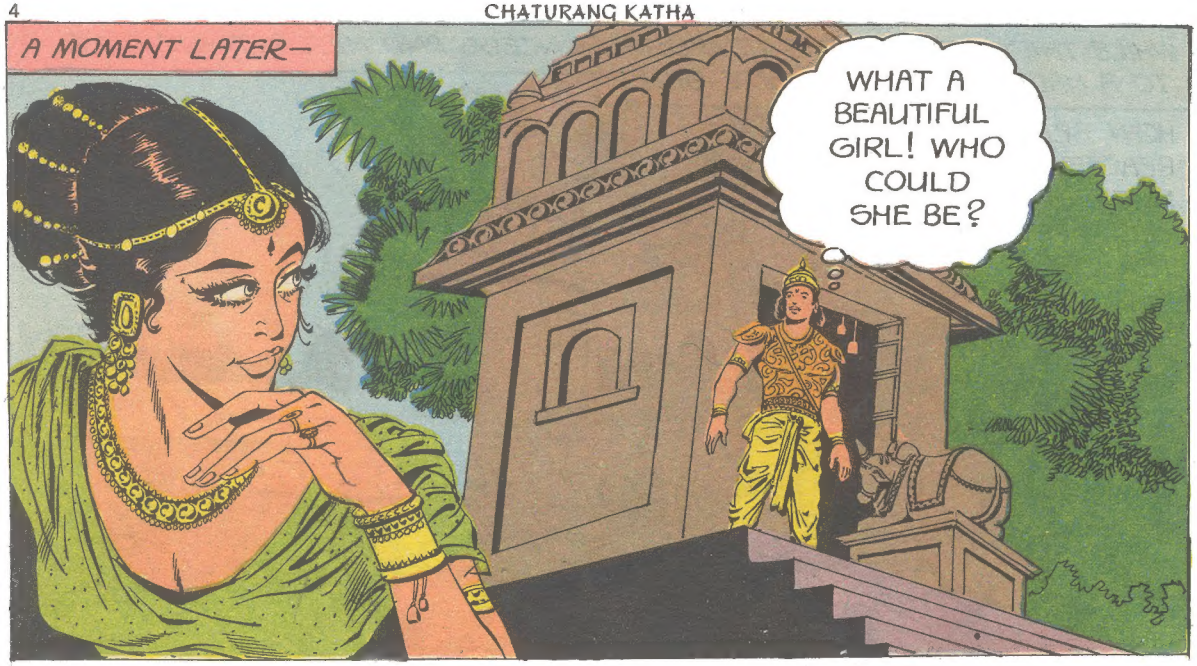
THEY WASHED THEIR HANDS AND FEET...

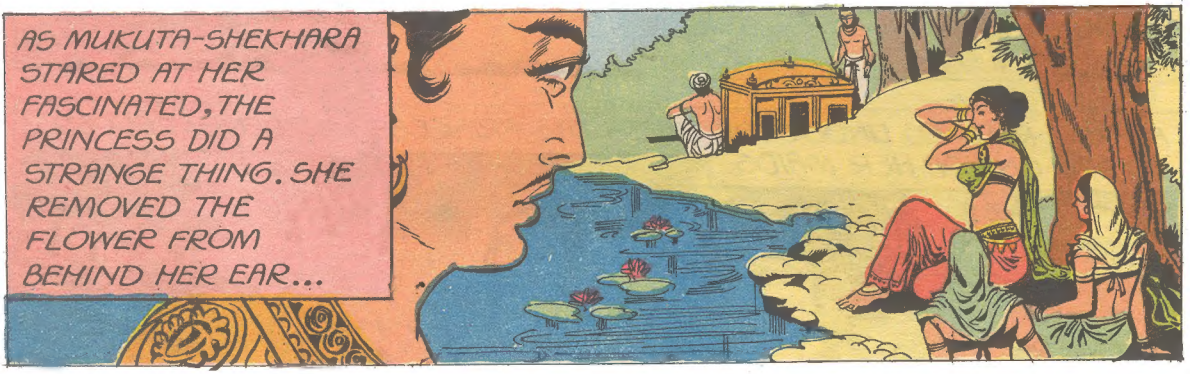
...AND WENT INTO THE TEMPLE.


WHILE THEY WERE IN THE TEMPLE A PRINCESS AND HER RETINUE CAME TO A HALT ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE.
HOW BEAUTIFUL AND PEACEFUL THIS PLACE IS! NOT A SOUL IN SIGHT. WE WILL REST HERE FOR A WHILE AND THEN GO ON.

AS THEY RELAXED UNDER THE TREES THE PRINCESS SUDDENLY CALLED OUT TO ONE OF HER MAIDS.
BRING ME ONE OF THOSE FLOWERS FOR MY HAIR.

THE MAID PICKED THE FLOWER AND FIXED IT BEHIND THE EAR OF THE PRINCESS.

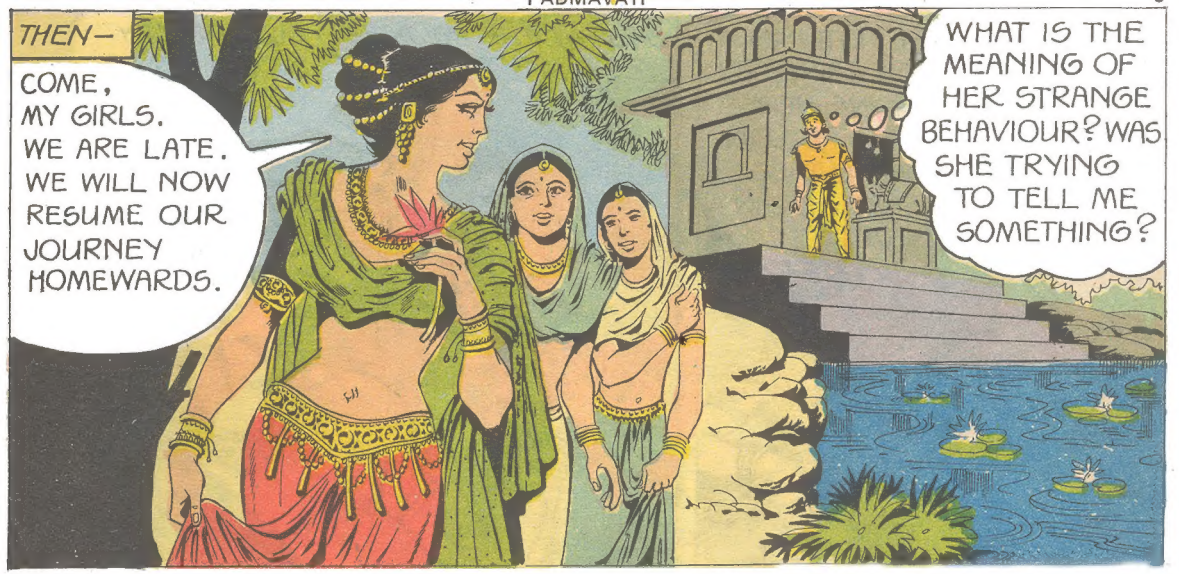

A MOMENT LATER—
WHAT A BEAUTIFUL GIRL! WHO COULD SHE BE?


AS MUKUTA-SHEKHARA STARED AT HER FASCINATED, THE PRINCESS DID A STRANGE THING. SHE REMOVED THE FLOWER FROM BEHIND HER EAR...

...BIT INTO ITS STALK...

...PLACED IT UNDER HER FOOT...

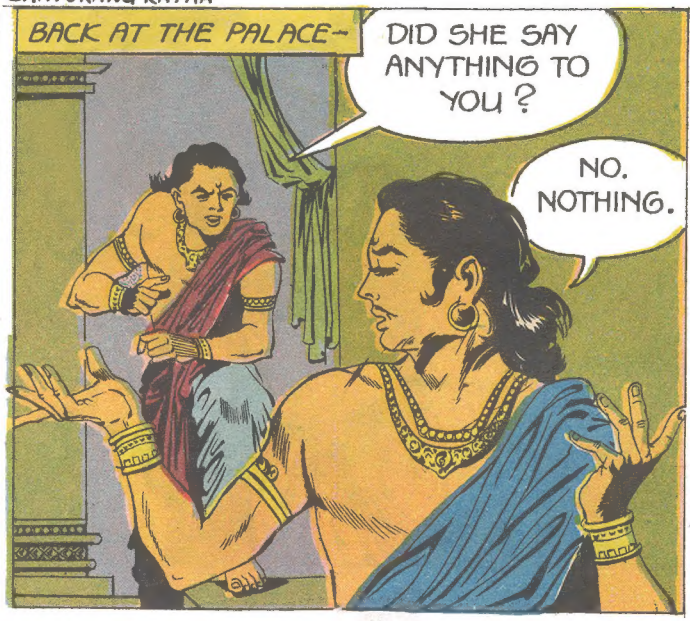
...AND PRESSED IT TO HER HEART.

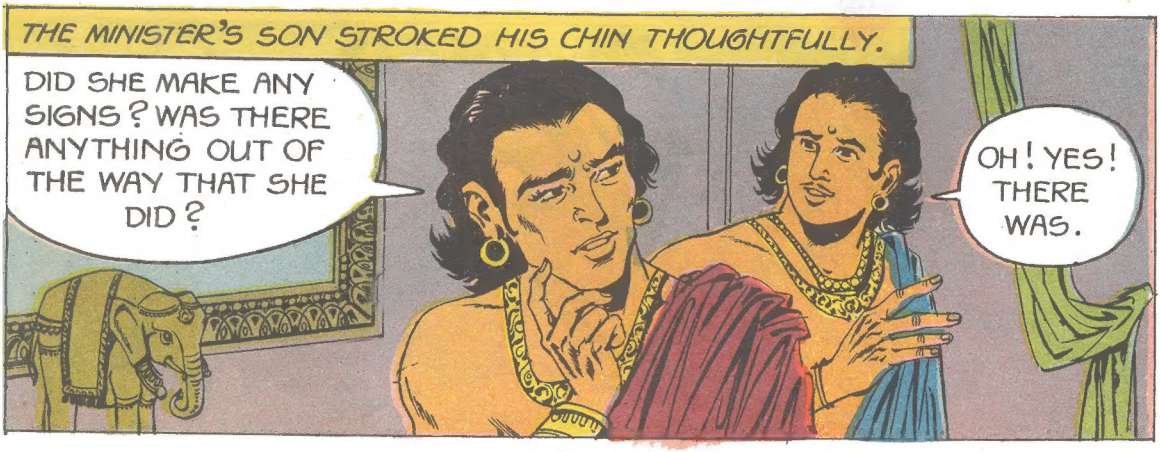

THEN—
COME, MY GIRLS. WE ARE LATE. WE WILL NOW RESUME OUR JOURNEY HOMEWARDS.
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF HER STRANGE BEHAVIOUR? WAS SHE TRYING TO TELL ME SOMETHING?

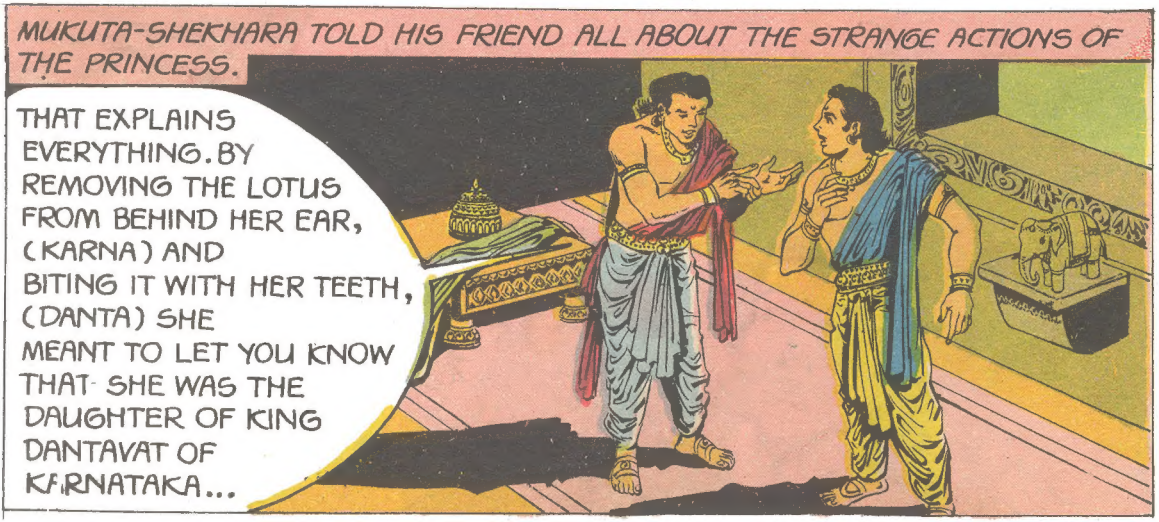
WHEN THEY HAD GONE, THE MINISTER'S SON CAME OUT OF THE TEMPLE.
SHE HAS GONE! SHE HAS STOLEN MY HEART AND I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHO SHE IS.

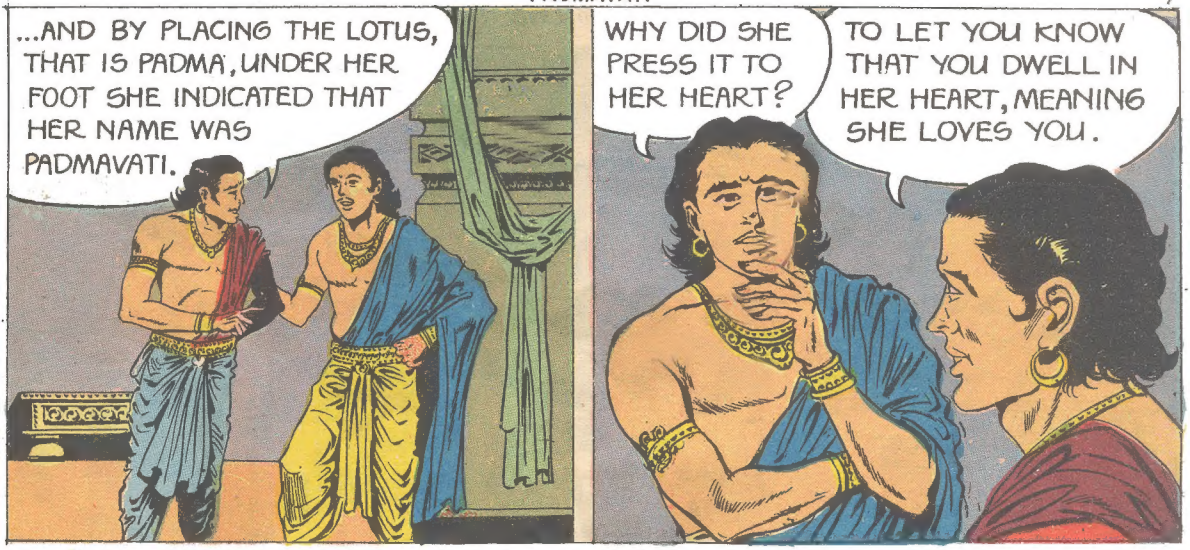
WHO HAS GONE?
THE MOST BEAUTIFUL MAIDEN ON EARTH. IF I CANNOT MARRY HER, I DON'T WANT TO LIVE.

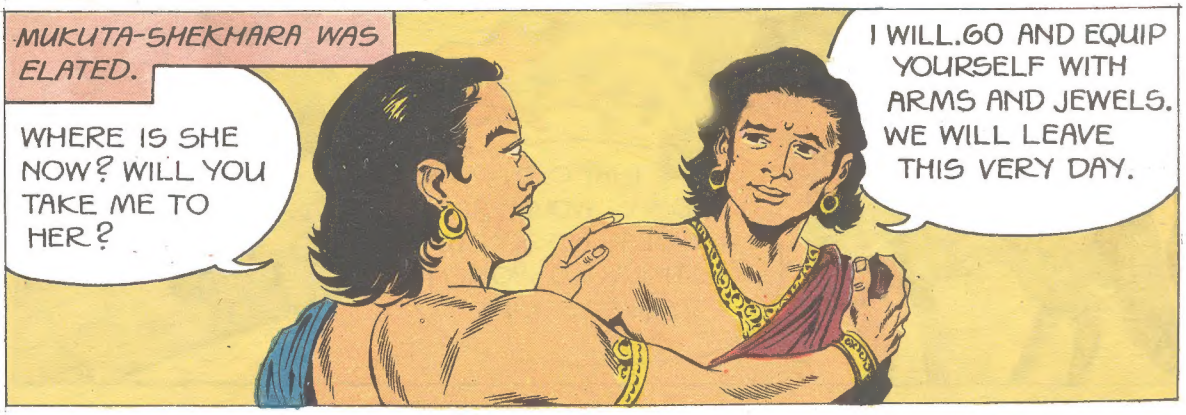
WELL, NOTHING CAN BE GAINED BY STANDING HERE. LET US RETURN HOME AND SEE WHAT WE CAN DO

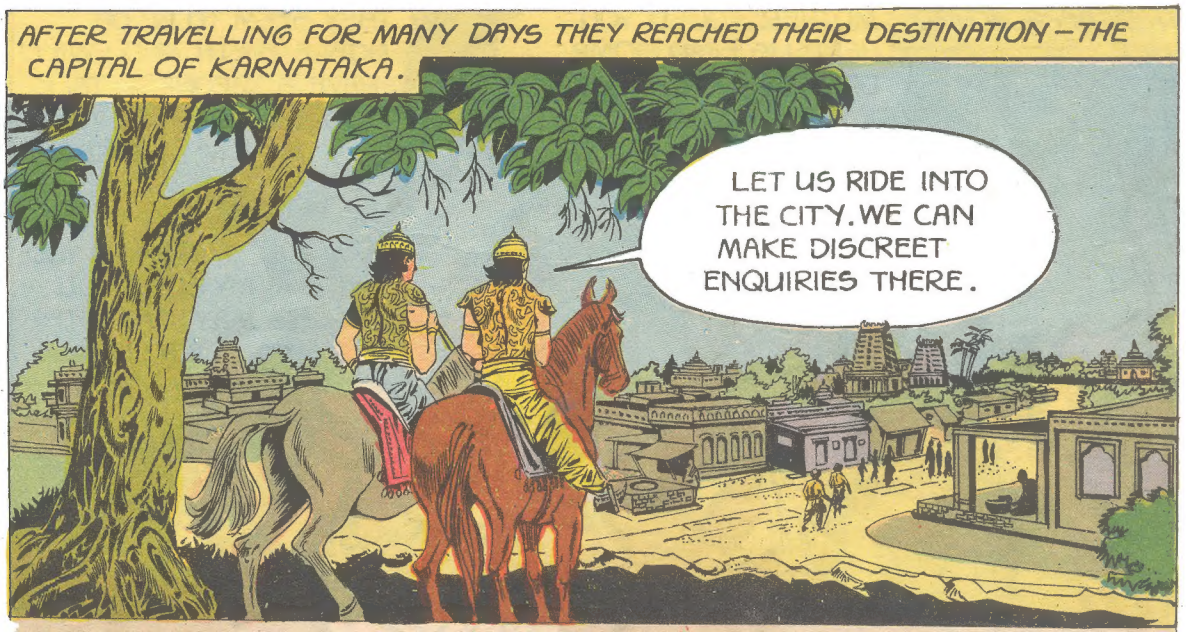

BACK AT THE PALACE–
DID SHE SAY ANYTHING TO YOU ?
NO. NOTHING.


THE MINISTER'S SON STROKED HIS CHIN THOUGHTFULLY.
DID SHE MAKE ANY SIGNS ? WAS THERE ANYTHING OUT OF THE WAY THAT SHE DID ?
OH ! YES ! THERE WAS.


MUKUTA-SHEKHARA TOLD HIS FRIEND ALL ABOUT THE STRANGE ACTIONS OF THE PRINCESS.
THAT EXPLAINS EVERYTHING. BY REMOVING THE LOTUS FROM BEHIND HER EAR, (KARNA) AND BITING IT WITH HER TEETH, (DANTA) SHE MEANT TO LET YOU KNOW THAT SHE WAS THE DAUGHTER OF KING DANTAVAT OF KARNATAKA...


...AND BY PLACING THE LOTUS, THAT IS PADMA, UNDER HER FOOT SHE INDICATED THAT HER NAME WAS PADMAVATI.
WHY DID SHE PRESS IT TO HER HEART?
TO LET YOU KNOW THAT YOU DWELL IN HER HEART, MEANING SHE LOVES YOU.


MUKUTA-SHEKHARA WAS ELATED.
WHERE IS SHE NOW? WILL YOU TAKE ME TO HER?
I WILL GO AND EQUIP YOURSELF WITH ARMS AND JEWELS. WE WILL LEAVE THIS VERY DAY.


AFTER TRAVELLING FOR MANY DAYS THEY REACHED THEIR DESTINATION—THE CAPITAL OF KARNATAKA.
LET US RIDE INTO THE CITY. WE CAN MAKE DISCREET ENQUIRIES THERE.

AS THEY NEARED THE PALACES OF KING DANTAVAT, HIS QUEEN AND THEIR DAUGHTER –

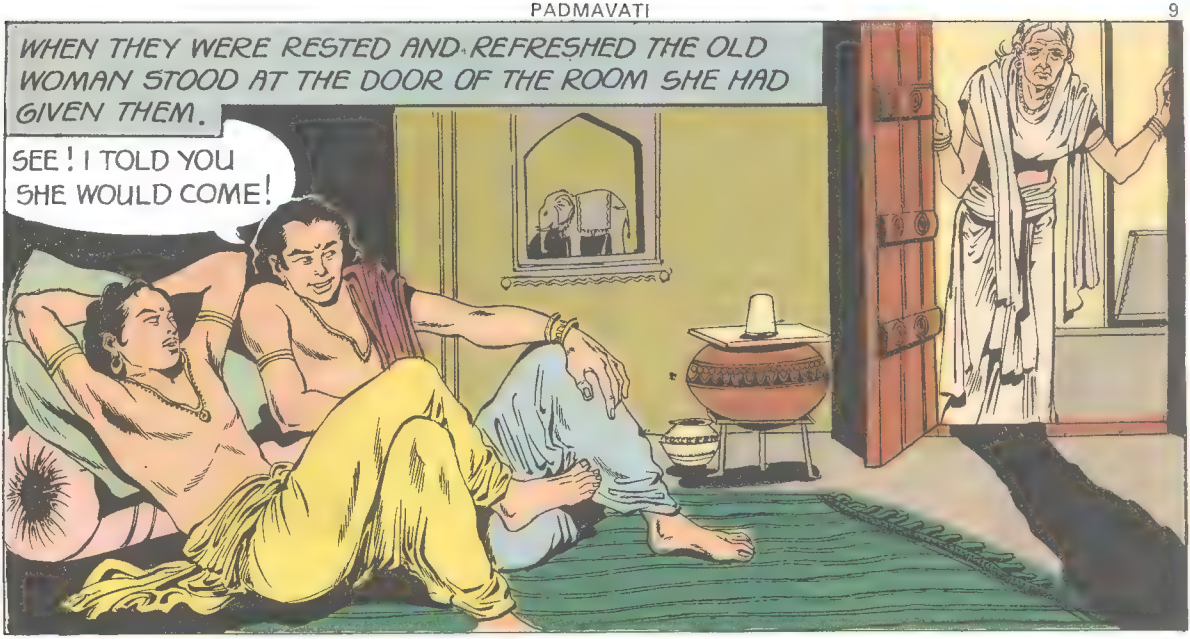
THAT OLD WOMAN WOULD BE THE IDEAL PERSON TO QUESTION. OLD WOMEN LOVE TO TALK.

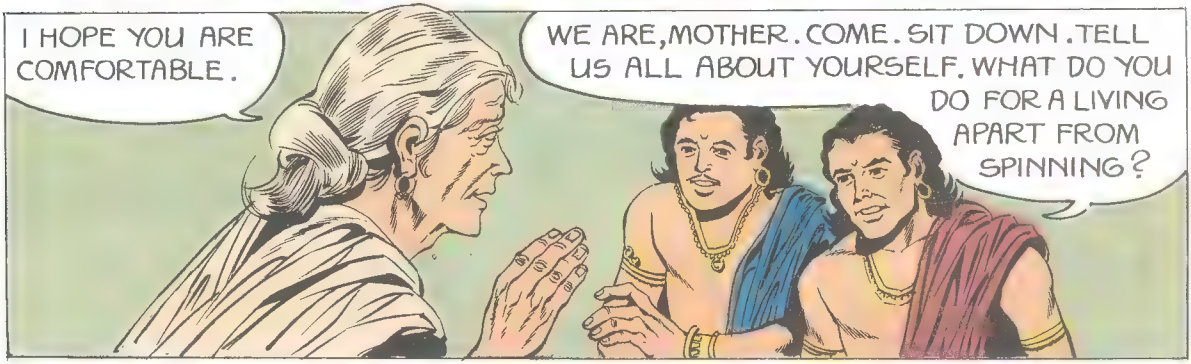
THEY APPROACHED HER.

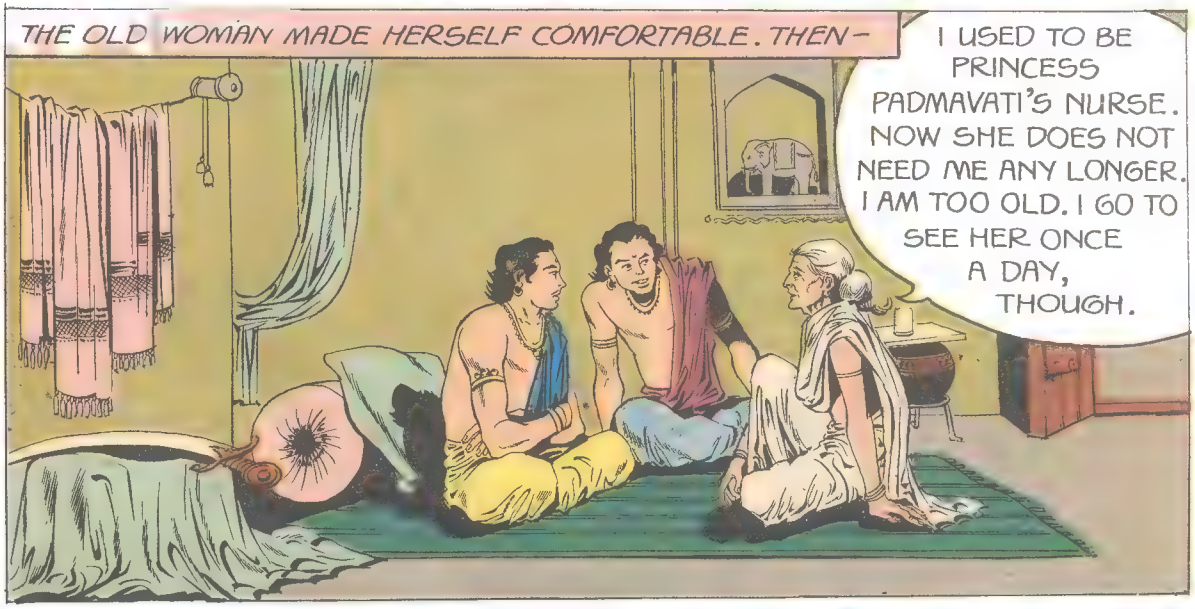
MOTHER, COULD YOU HELP US FIND SOME LODGINGS? WE ARE STRANGERS TO THIS CITY.

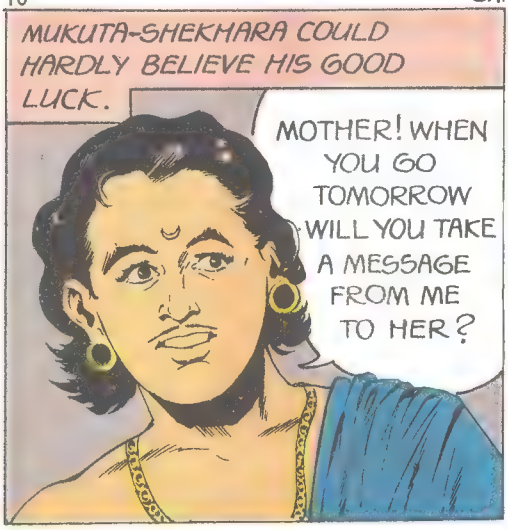
THEY SEEM TO BE OF NOBLE BIRTH AND I WILL HAVE SOMEONE TO TALK TO. I WILL OFFER THEM MY OWN HOME.

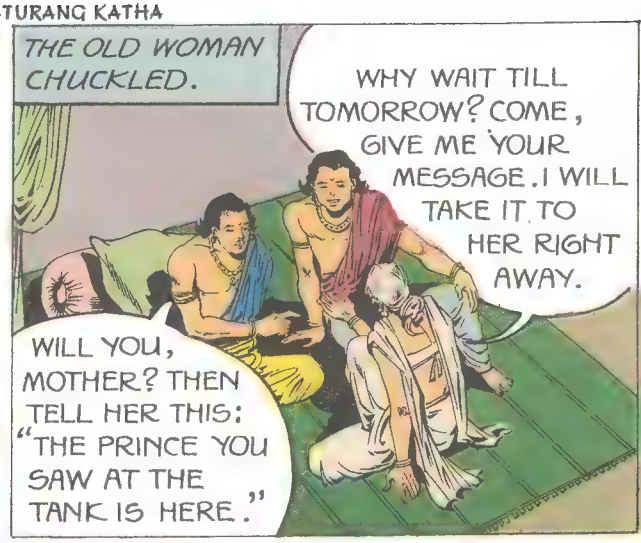
MY HOME IS OPEN TO YOU, MY SONS. YOU MAY STAY WITH ME AS LONG AS YOU WISH.

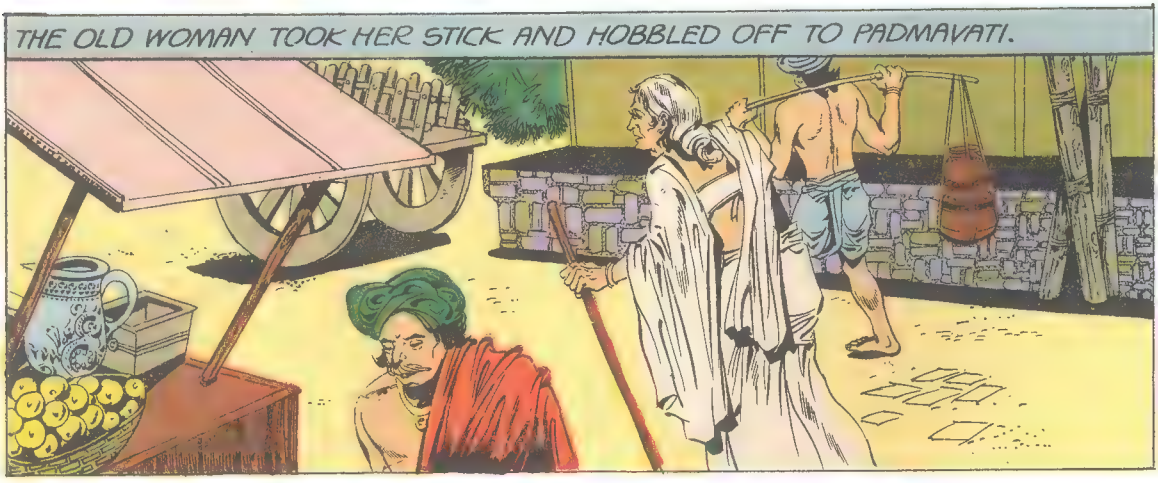

WHEN THEY WERE RESTED AND REFRESHED THE OLD WOMAN STOOD AT THE DOOR OF THE ROOM SHE HAD GIVEN THEM.
SEE! I TOLD YOU SHE WOULD COME!

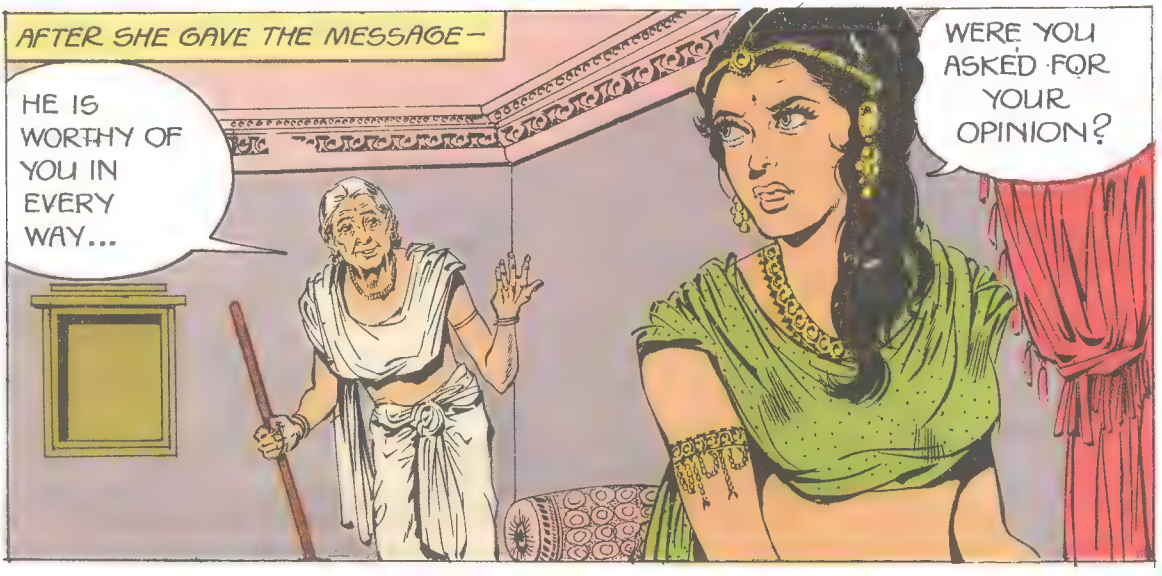

I HOPE YOU ARE COMFORTABLE.
WE ARE, MOTHER. COME. SIT DOWN. TELL US ALL ABOUT YOURSELF. WHAT DO YOU DO FOR A LIVING APART FROM SPINNING?


THE OLD WOMAN MADE HERSELF COMFORTABLE. THEN—
I USED TO BE PRINCESS PADMAVATI'S NURSE. NOW SHE DOES NOT NEED ME ANY LONGER. I AM TOO OLD. I GO TO SEE HER ONCE A DAY, THOUGH.


MUKUTA-SHEKHARA COULD HARDLY BELIEVE HIS GOOD LUCK.
MOTHER! WHEN YOU GO TOMORROW WILL YOU TAKE A MESSAGE FROM ME TO HER?


THE OLD WOMAN CHUCKLED.
WHY WAIT TILL TOMORROW? COME, GIVE ME YOUR MESSAGE. I WILL TAKE IT TO HER RIGHT AWAY.
WILL YOU, MOTHER? THEN TELL HER THIS: "THE PRINCE YOU SAW AT THE TANK IS HERE."


THE OLD WOMAN TOOK HER STICK AND HOBBLED OFF TO PADMAVATI.


AFTER SHE GAVE THE MESSAGE—
HE IS WORTHY OF YOU IN EVERY WAY...
WERE YOU ASKED FOR YOUR OPINION?

THEN, PRETENDING TO BE ANGRY, PADMAVATI SLAPPED THE OLD WOMAN WITH BOTH HER HANDS.
GO AWAY. DON'T EVER LET ME SEE YOU AGAIN.
BU...BU... BUT...
I HAVE NEVER SEEN HER BEHAVE LIKE THIS. WELL, IF SHE DOES NOT WANT TO MARRY THE PRINCE WHY SHOULD I CARE?
THE OLD WOMAN HOBBLED BACK TO MUKUTA-SHEKHARA AND TOLD HIM ALL. THE DEJECTED PRINCE TURNED TO HIS COMPANION.
YOUR INTERPRETATION PROVES TO HAVE BEEN WRONG.
QUITE THE CONTRARY. YOU HAVE NOT UNDERSTOOD.
BY SLAPPING THE OLD WOMAN'S FACE WITH ALL TEN FINGERS SHE MEANT TO SAY THAT SHE WOULD MEET YOU TEN DAYS HENCE.
OF COURSE, THAT'S WHAT SHE MEANT! YOU ARE CLEVER, MY SON.
I ALWAYS KNEW SHE WAS A DEEP ONE.

TEN DAYS LATER–

MOTHER, PRINCESS PADMAVATI HAS PROMISED TO SEE ME TODAY. WILL YOU FIND OUT WHEN AND WHERE I SHOULD MEET HER.

I WILL GO THIS VERY MOMENT, SON.

BUT WHEN THE OLD WOMAN QUESTIONED THE PRINCESS–

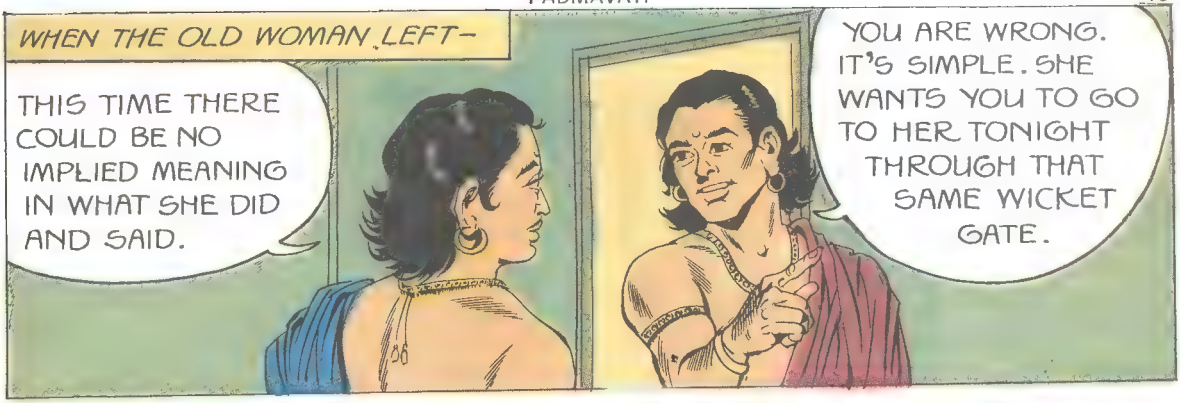
WILL YOU NEVER LEAVE ME ALONE? COME HERE.

FEIGNING ANGER, PADMAVATI LED THE OLD WOMAN TO A LITTLE WICKET GATE.

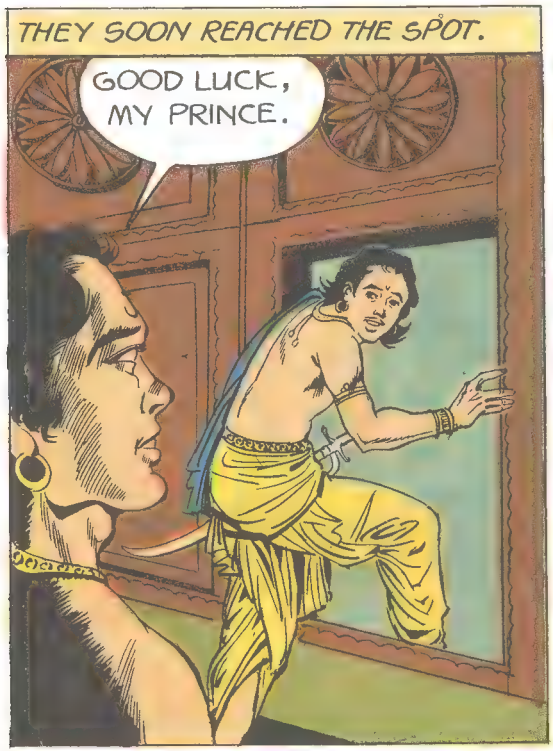
OUT WITH YOU! DON'T YOU DARE SHOW ME YOUR FACE AGAIN.

THE OLD WOMAN CAME BACK TO MUKUTA-SHEKHARA AND THE MINISTER'S SON, AND TOLD THEM WHAT HAD HAPPENED.

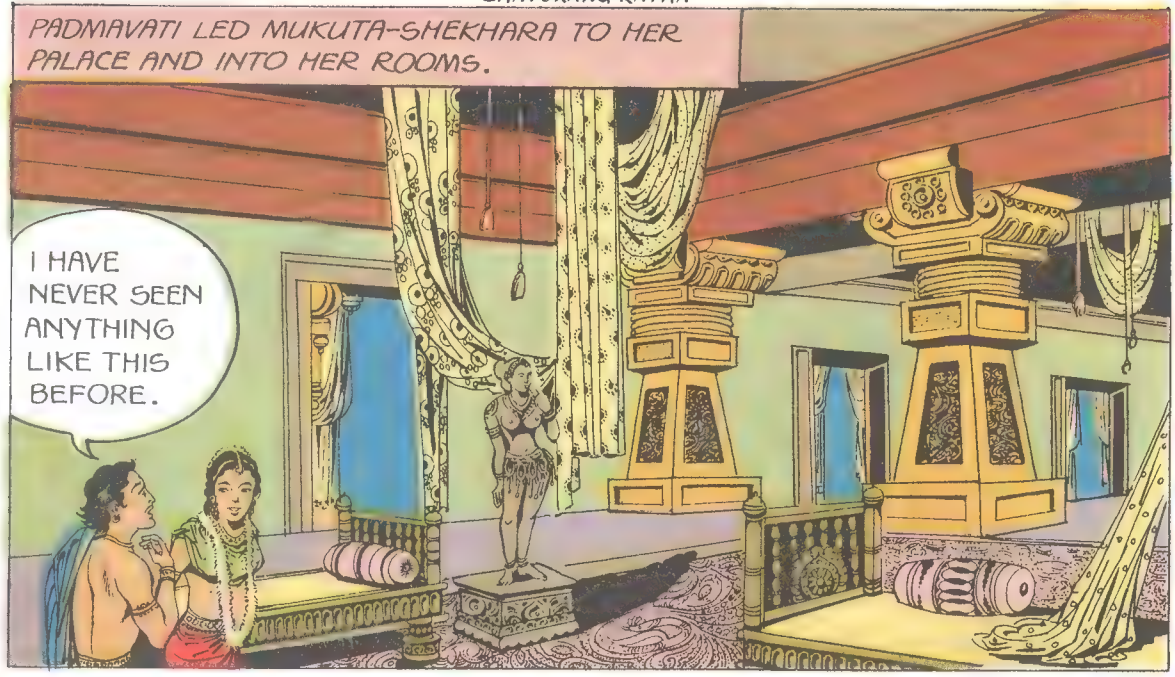
NOW I WILL NOT GO TO HER EVEN IF YOU BEG ME ON YOUR KNEES.


WHEN THE OLD WOMAN LEFT–
THIS TIME THERE COULD BE NO IMPLIED MEANING IN WHAT SHE DID AND SAID.
YOU ARE WRONG. IT'S SIMPLE. SHE WANTS YOU TO GO TO HER TONIGHT THROUGH THAT SAME WICKET GATE.

THAT NIGHT–
THIS WAY.
I'M NERVOUS.

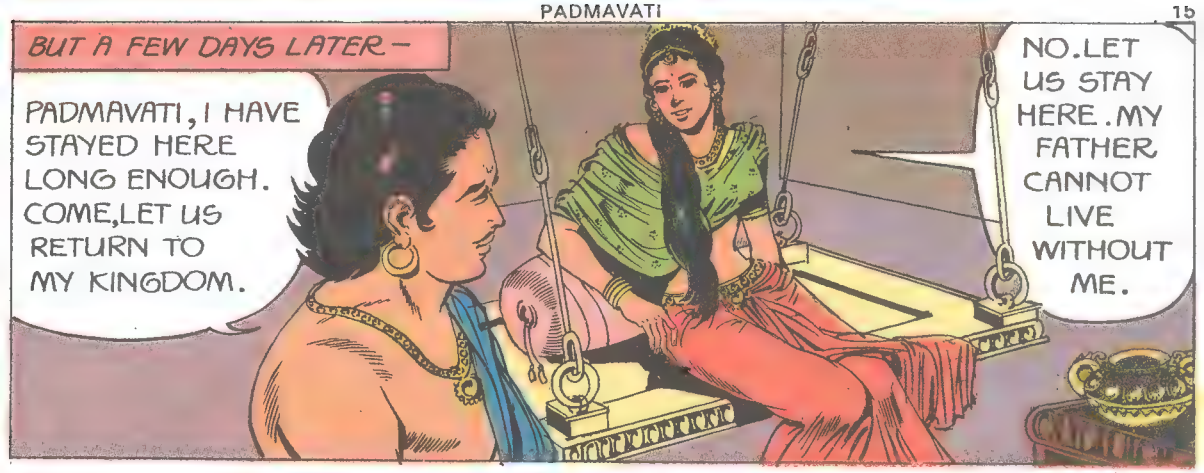

THEY SOON REACHED THE SPOT.
GOOD LUCK, MY PRINCE.

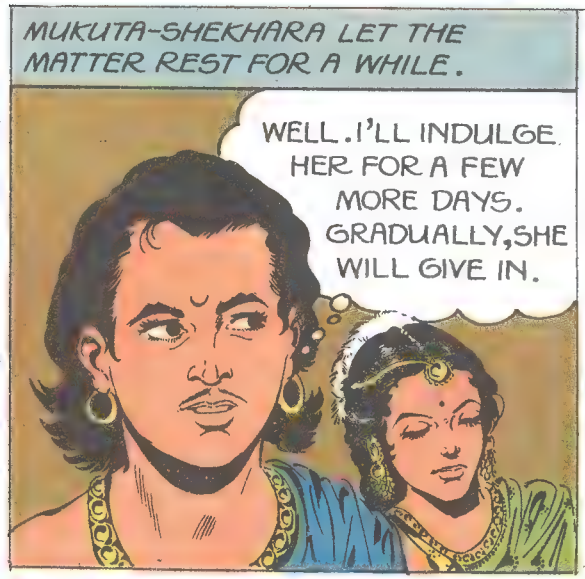
PADMAVATI WAS THERE, WAITING.
COME MY BELOVED.

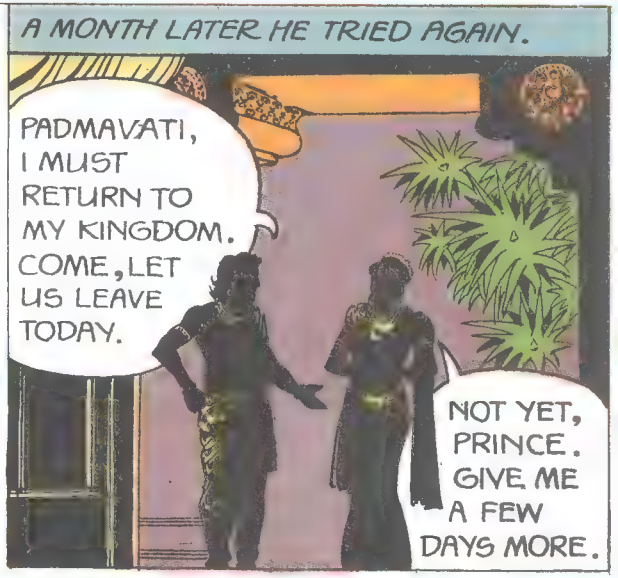

PADMAVATI LED MUKUTA-SHEKHARA TO HER PALACE AND INTO HER ROOMS.
I HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS BEFORE.

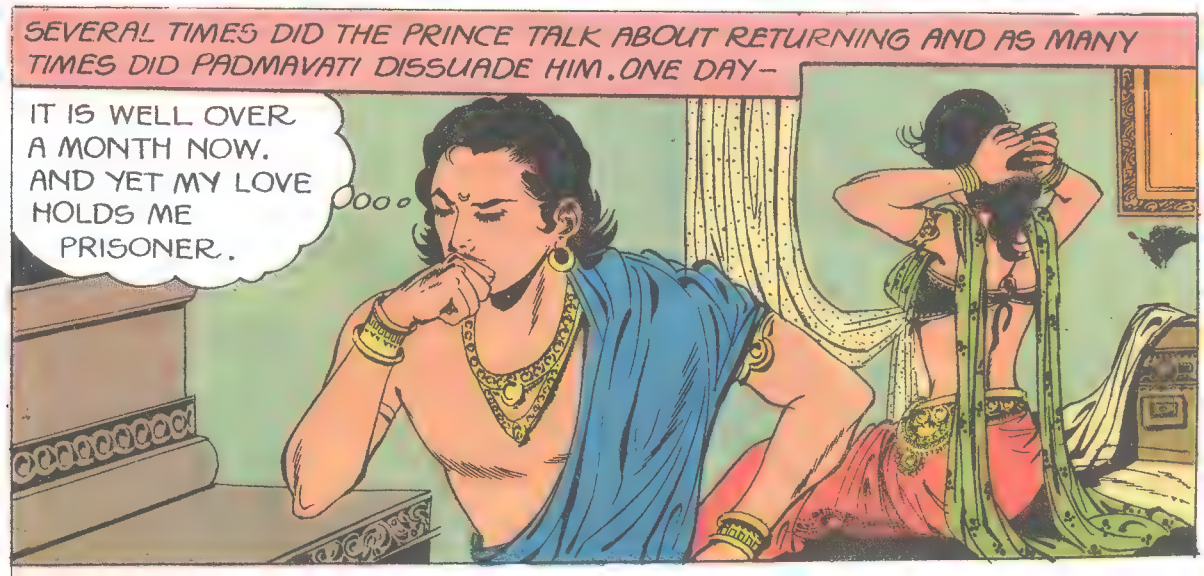
PADMAVATI THEN REMOVED THE GARLAND FROM HER NECK AND—
YOU ARE NOW MY OWN HUSBAND.

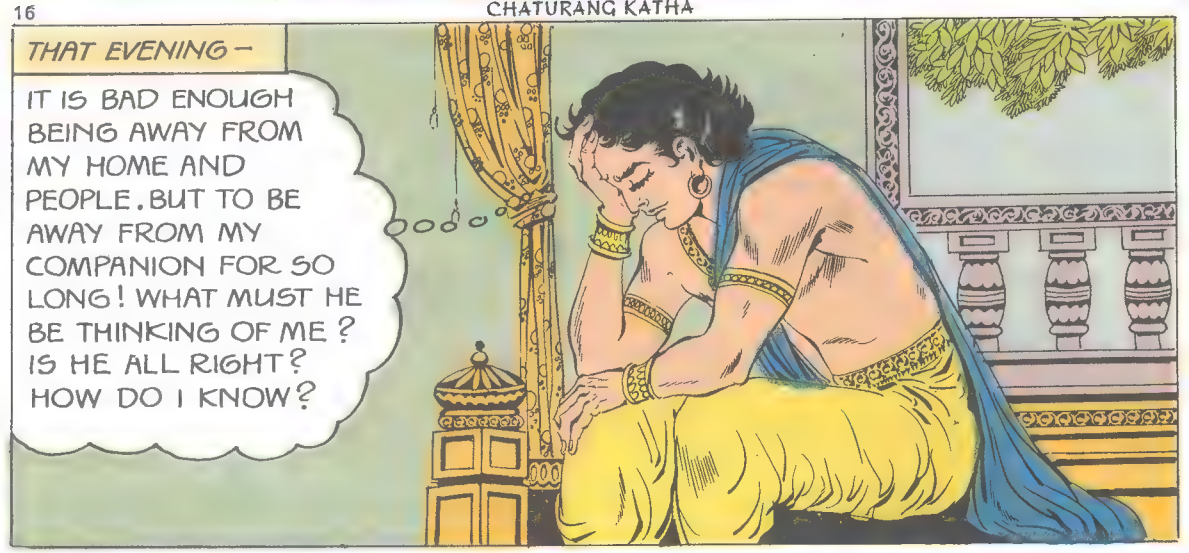
PADMAVATI WAS DEVOTED TO MUKUTA-SHEKHARA AND ATTENDED TO HIS EVERY NEED.

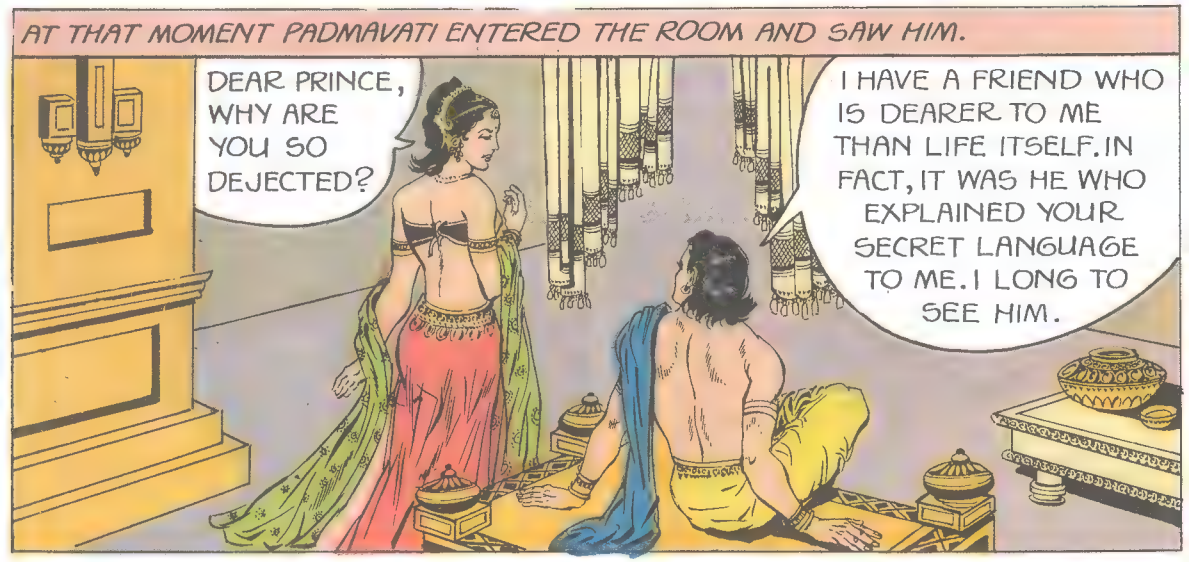

BUT A FEW DAYS LATER –
PADMAVATI, I HAVE STAYED HERE LONG ENOUGH. COME, LET US RETURN TO MY KINGDOM.
NO. LET US STAY HERE. MY FATHER CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT ME.


MUKUTA-SHEKHARA LET THE MATTER REST FOR A WHILE.
WELL. I'LL INDULGE HER FOR A FEW MORE DAYS. GRADUALLY, SHE WILL GIVE IN.

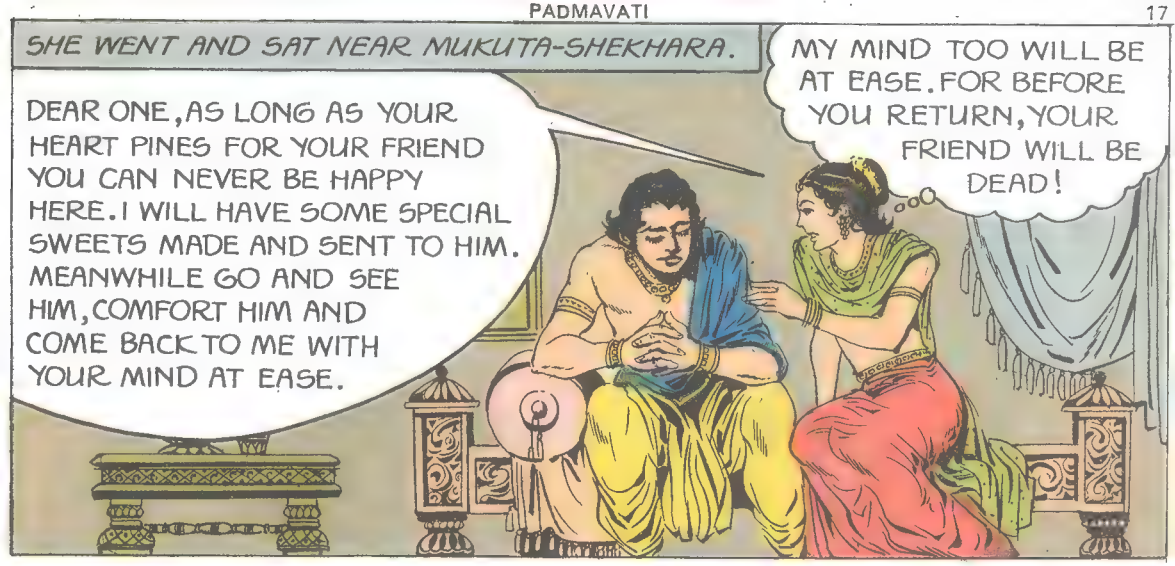

A MONTH LATER HE TRIED AGAIN.
PADMAVATI, I MUST RETURN TO MY KINGDOM. COME, LET US LEAVE TODAY.
NOT YET, PRINCE. GIVE ME A FEW DAYS MORE.

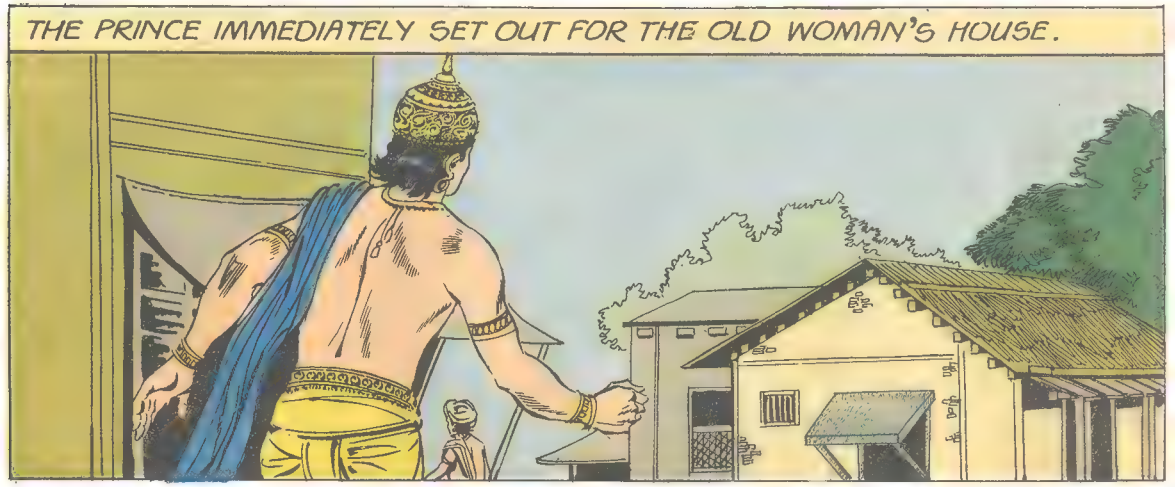

SEVERAL TIMES DID THE PRINCE TALK ABOUT RETURNING AND AS MANY TIMES DID PADMAVATI DISSUADE HIM. ONE DAY –
IT IS WELL OVER A MONTH NOW. AND YET MY LOVE HOLDS ME PRISONER.

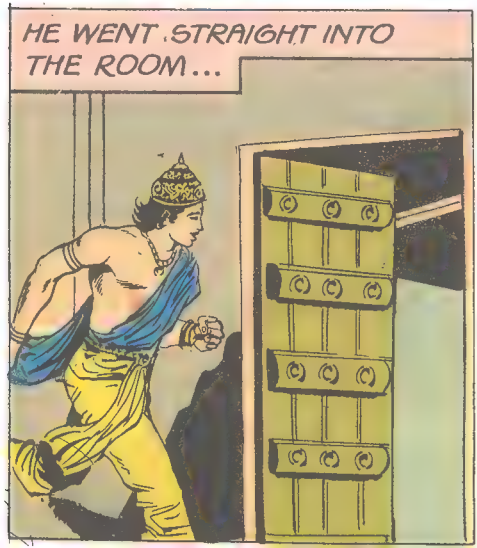

THAT EVENING –
IT IS BAD ENOUGH BEING AWAY FROM MY HOME AND PEOPLE. BUT TO BE AWAY FROM MY COMPANION FOR SO LONG! WHAT MUST HE BE THINKING OF ME? IS HE ALL RIGHT? HOW DO I KNOW?

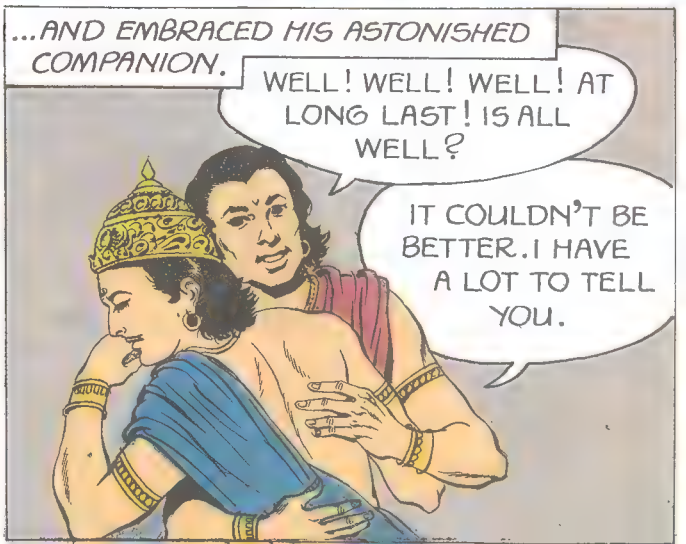

AT THAT MOMENT PADMAVATI ENTERED THE ROOM AND SAW HIM.
DEAR PRINCE, WHY ARE YOU SO DEJECTED?
I HAVE A FRIEND WHO IS DEARER TO ME THAN LIFE ITSELF. IN FACT, IT WAS HE WHO EXPLAINED YOUR SECRET LANGUAGE TO ME. I LONG TO SEE HIM.

PADMAVATI WAS SEIZED BY A FIT OF DEEP JEALOUSY.
IN SPITE OF ALL MY ATTENTIONS IT IS HIS FRIEND THAT HE LONGS FOR. WELL, I'M LUCKY THAT I KNOW HOW TO DEAL WITH SUCH A SITUATION.

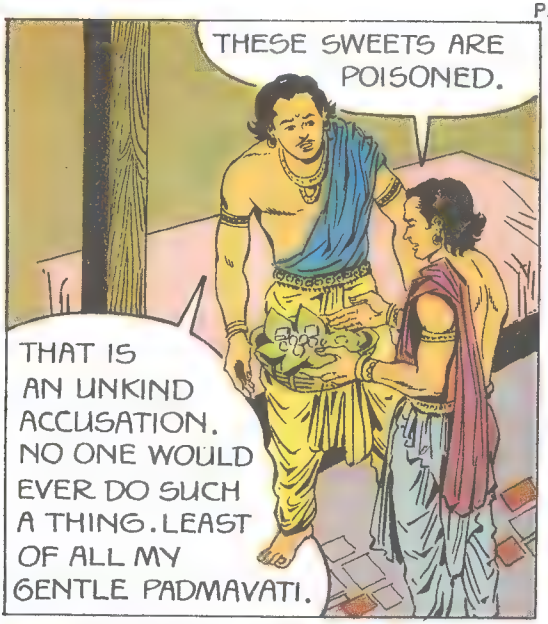

SHE WENT AND SAT NEAR MUKUTA-SHEKHARA.
DEAR ONE, AS LONG AS YOUR HEART PINES FOR YOUR FRIEND YOU CAN NEVER BE HAPPY HERE. I WILL HAVE SOME SPECIAL SWEETS MADE AND SENT TO HIM. MEANWHILE GO AND SEE HIM, COMFORT HIM AND COME BACK TO ME WITH YOUR MIND AT EASE.
MY MIND TOO WILL BE AT EASE. FOR BEFORE YOU RETURN, YOUR FRIEND WILL BE DEAD!


THE PRINCE IMMEDIATELY SET OUT FOR THE OLD WOMAN'S HOUSE.

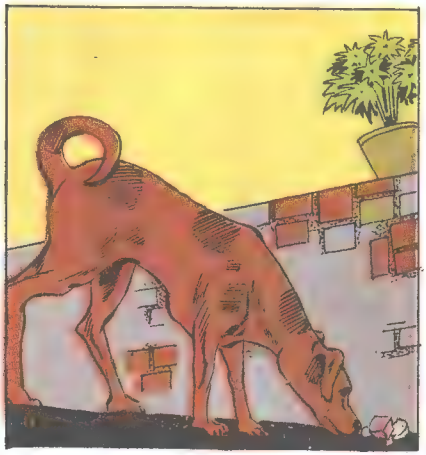

HE WENT STRAIGHT INTO THE ROOM...

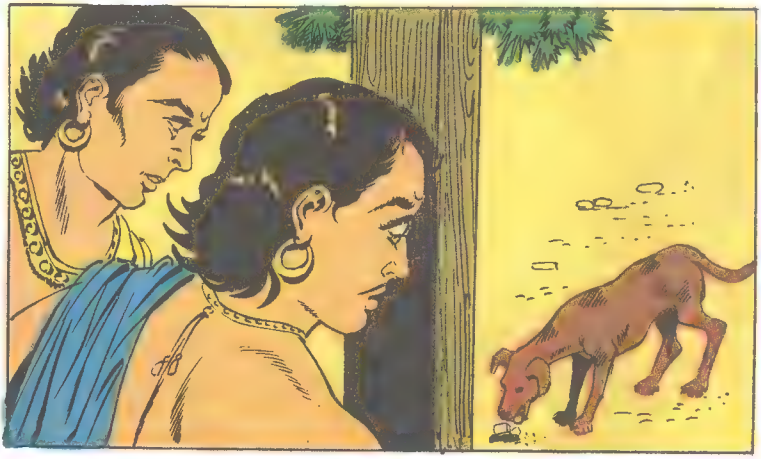

...AND EMBRACED HIS ASTONISHED COMPANION.
WELL! WELL! WELL! AT LONG LAST! IS ALL WELL?
IT COULDN'T BE BETTER. I HAVE A LOT TO TELL YOU.

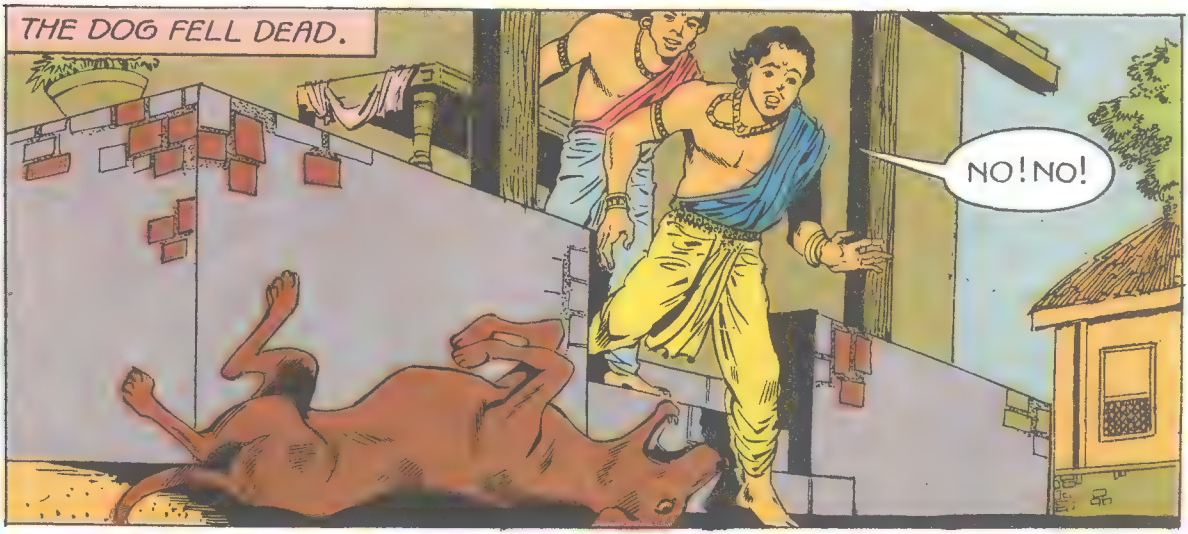
HARDLY HAD THE TWO SETTLED DOWN WHEN THE SWEETS ARRIVED.
WELL NOW! WHO COULD HAVE SENT THESE?
IT IS PADMAVATI. SHE HAS HAD THEM SPECIALLY MADE FOR YOU.
BUT WHY?
THE PRINCE TOLD HIS COMPANION ABOUT ALL THAT HAD PASSED BETWEEN PADMAVATI AND HIM THAT EVENING.
COME, EAT SOME OF THE SWEETS AS WE TALK!
BUT HIS FRIEND REACTED STRANGELY.
O PRINCE, IT WAS NOT WISE OF YOU TO TALK TO PADMAVATI ABOUT ME. IN HER JEALOUSY SHE HAS PLANNED TO GET RID OF ME.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?


THESE SWEETS ARE POISONED.
THAT IS AN UNKIND ACCUSATION. NO ONE WOULD EVER DO SUCH A THING. LEAST OF ALL MY GENTLE PADMAVATI.

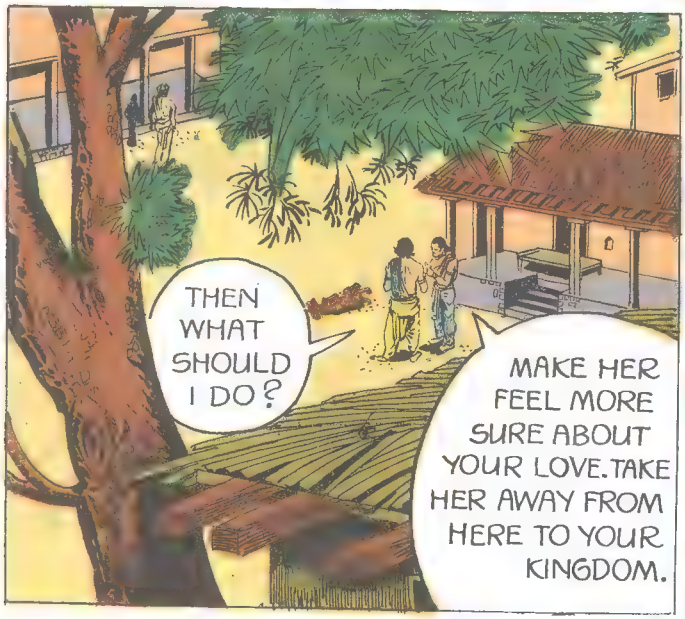
TO PROVE HIS WORDS HE THREW A SWEET TO A DOG THAT HAPPENED TO PASS BY.





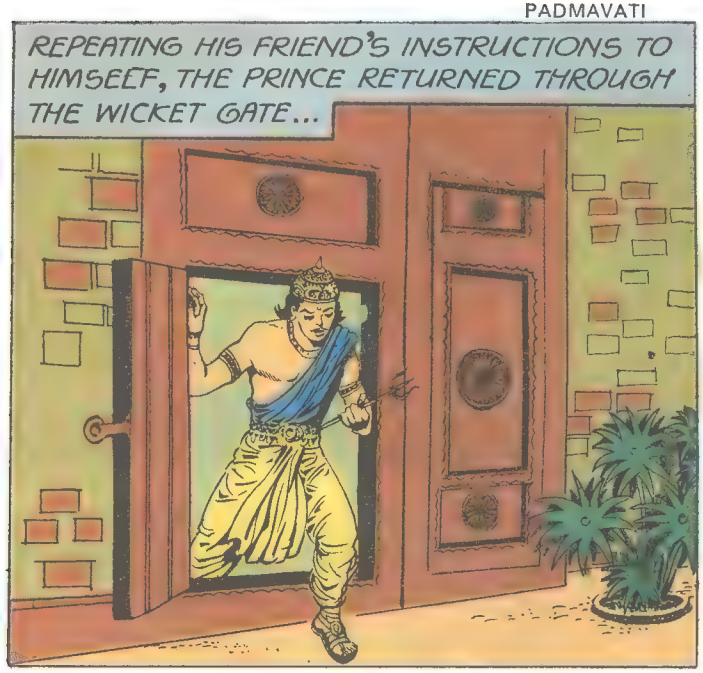

THE DOG FELL DEAD.
NO! NO!

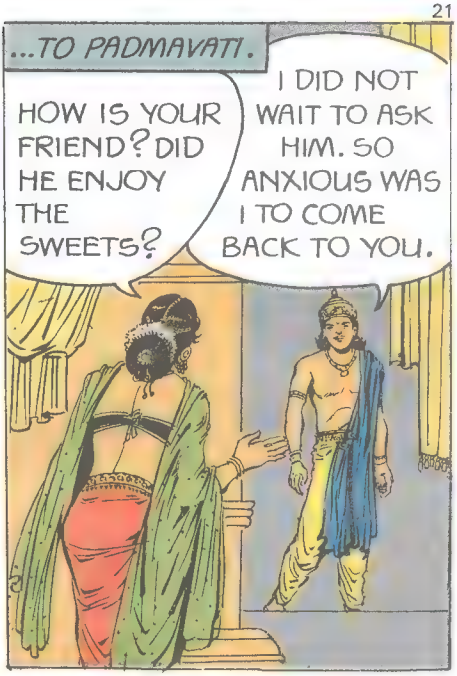
THE PRINCE COULD HARDLY SPEAK.
THA...THAT EVIL WOMAN. I WILL NOT GO BACK...NO, I WILL GO BACK AND STRANGLE THE LIFE OUT OF...
NO. YOU WILL NOT. SHE WAS PROMPTED BY JEALOUSY. IT WAS HER POSSESSIVE LOVE FOR YOU THAT MADE HER DO IT. SHE WAS AFRAID I WOULD TAKE YOU AWAY FROM HER.

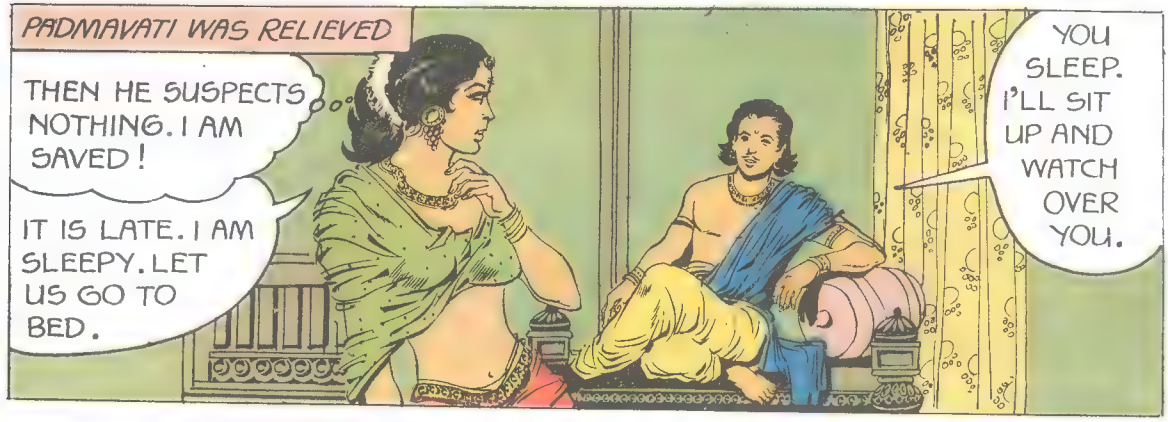

THEN WHAT SHOULD I DO?
MAKE HER FEEL MORE SURE ABOUT YOUR LOVE. TAKE HER AWAY FROM HERE TO YOUR KINGDOM.

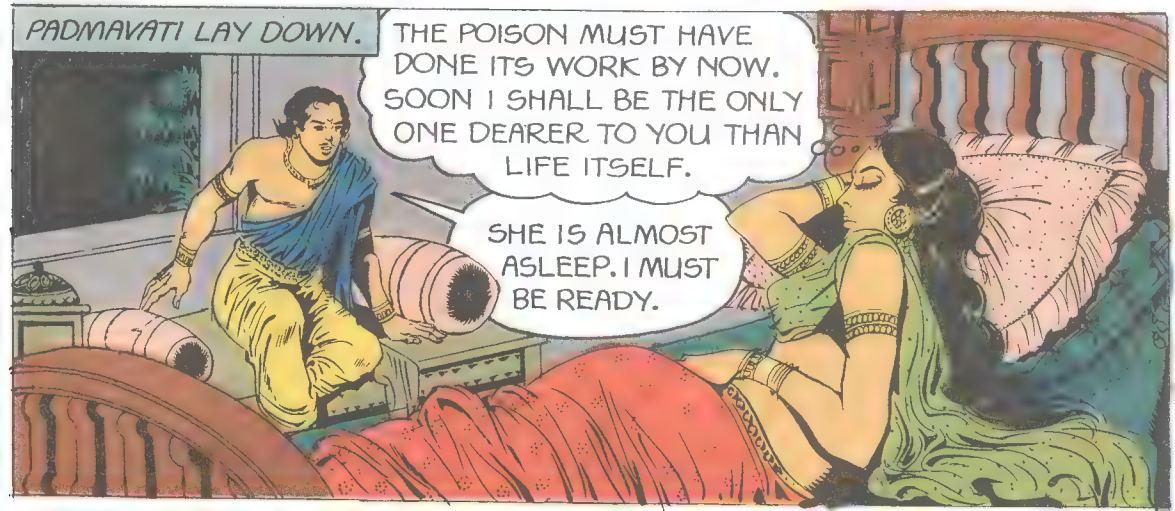
YOU ALONE CAN TELL ME HOW.
GO BACK TO HER. THEN DO EXACTLY AS I TELL YOU.

AS SOON AS YOU SEE HER BE VERY CORDIAL. THEN WHEN SHE FALLS ASLEEP REMOVE HER JEWELRY, STRIKE HER ON HER LEFT FOOT WITH THIS TRIDENT, AND COME BACK TO ME.


REPEATING HIS FRIEND'S INSTRUCTIONS TO HIMSELF, THE PRINCE RETURNED THROUGH THE WICKET GATE...

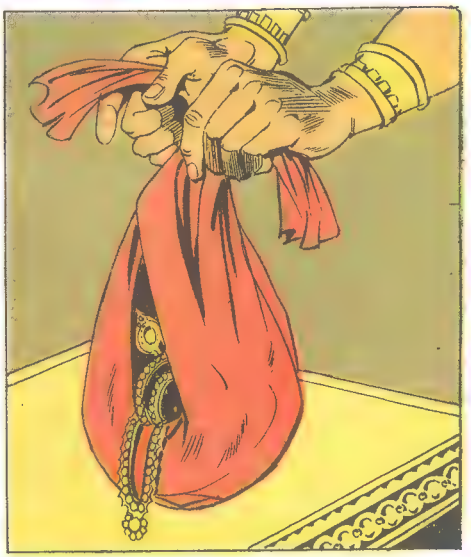

...TO PADMAVATI.
HOW IS YOUR FRIEND? DID HE ENJOY THE SWEETS?
I DID NOT WAIT TO ASK HIM. SO ANXIOUS WAS I TO COME BACK TO YOU.


PADMAVATI WAS RELIEVED
THEN HE SUSPECTS NOTHING. I AM SAVED!
IT IS LATE. I AM SLEEPY. LET US GO TO BED.
YOU SLEEP. I'LL SIT UP AND WATCH OVER YOU.

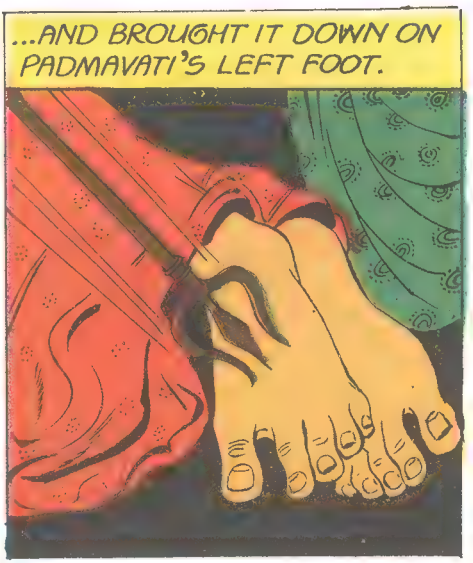

PADMAVATI LAY DOWN.
THE POISON MUST HAVE DONE ITS WORK BY NOW. SOON I SHALL BE THE ONLY ONE DEARER TO YOU THAN LIFE ITSELF.
SHE IS ALMOST ASLEEP. I MUST BE READY.

PADMAVATI WAS SOON FAST ASLEEP.
NOW TO REMOVE THE ORNAMENTS.

ONE BY ONE HE REMOVED ALL OF THEM.

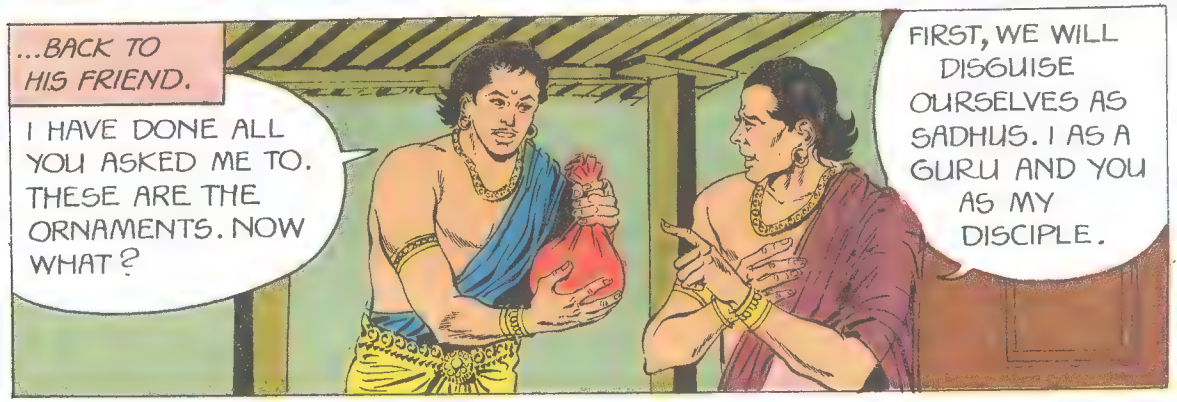


THEN HE RAISED THE TRIDENT...

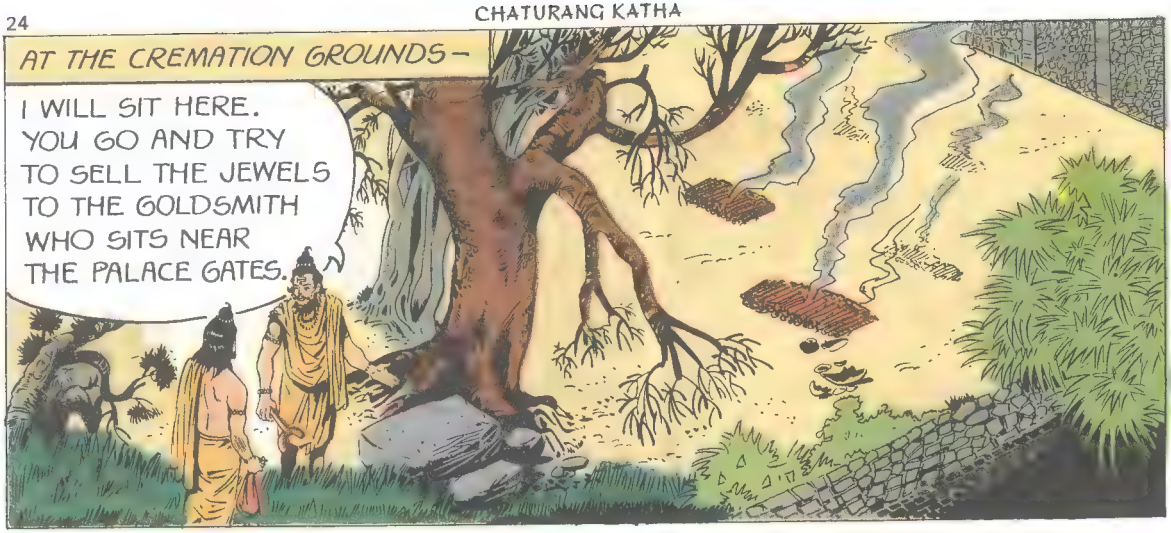

...AND BROUGHT IT DOWN ON PADMAVATI'S LEFT FOOT.

WITHOUT STOPPING TO LOOK BACK, HE RAN OUT OF THE HOUSE...

... AND THROUGH THE WICKET GATE...

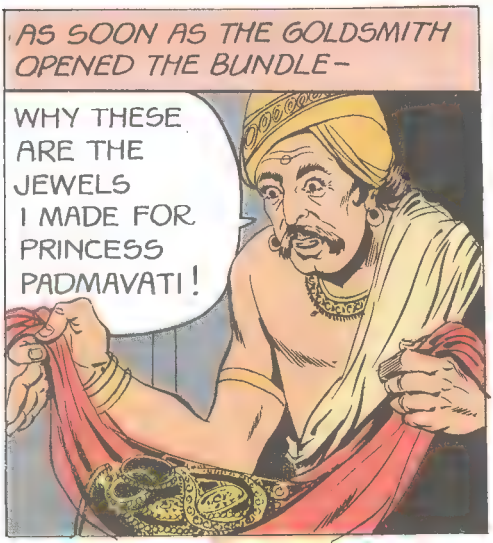

...BACK TO HIS FRIEND.
I HAVE DONE ALL YOU ASKED ME TO. THESE ARE THE ORNAMENTS. NOW WHAT?
FIRST, WE WILL DISGUISE OURSELVES AS SADHUS. I AS A GURU AND YOU AS MY DISCIPLE.

AS SOON AS THEY WERE DISGUISED—
TAKE THE BUNDLE OF JEWELRY. WE ARE GOING TO THE CREMATION GROUNDS.

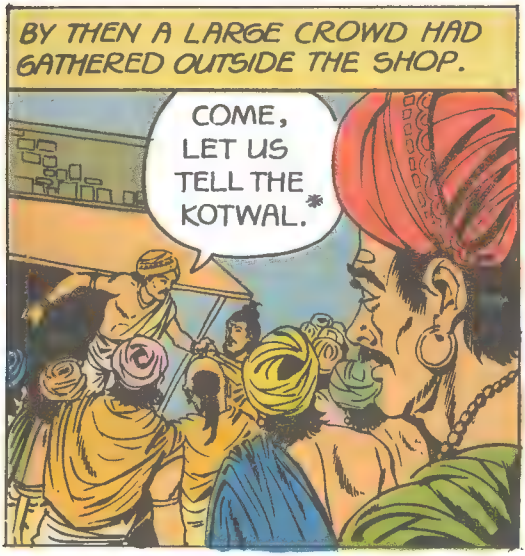

AT THE CREMATION GROUNDS–
I WILL SIT HERE. YOU GO AND TRY TO SELL THE JEWELS TO THE GOLDSMITH WHO SITS NEAR THE PALACE GATES.

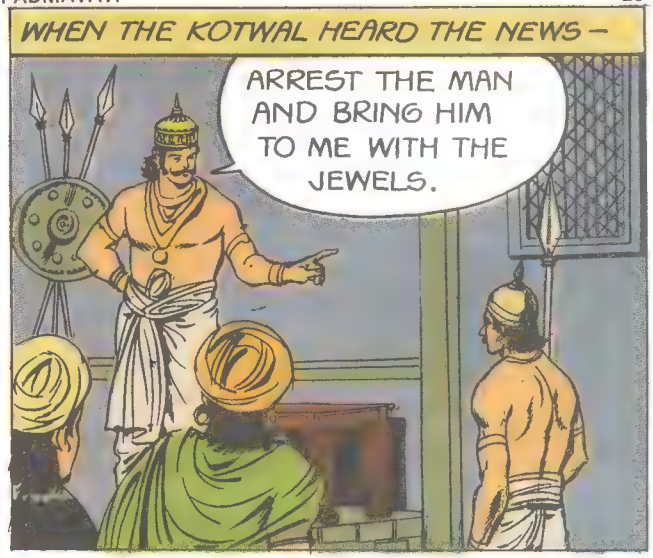
WHAT IF ANYONE SHOULD QUESTION ME?
BRING HIM TO ME.

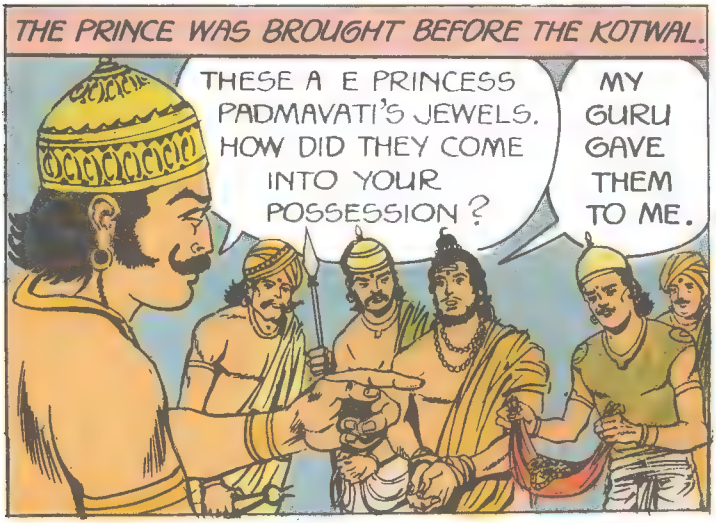
THE PRINCE DID AS HE WAS TOLD AND STOOD BEFORE THE GOLDSMITH.
WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU, O HOLY ONE?
I HAVE SOME JEWELRY TO SELL.

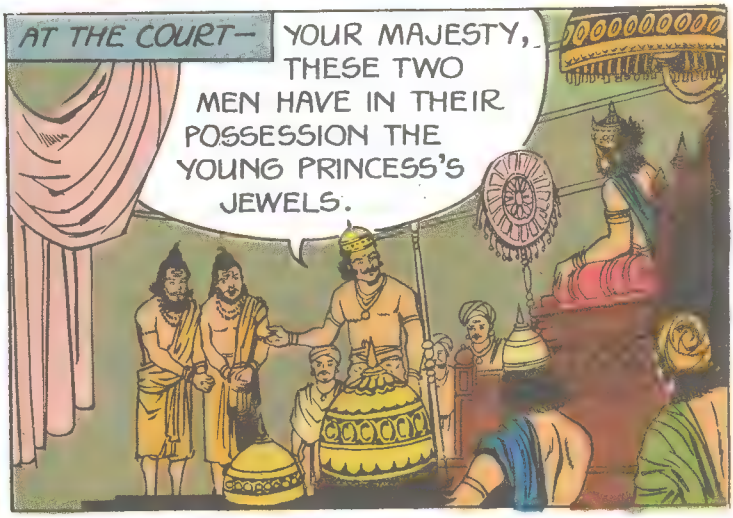

AS SOON AS THE GOLDSMITH OPENED THE BUNDLE–
WHY THESE ARE THE JEWELS I MADE FOR PRINCESS PADMAVATI!

HOW DID YOU COME BY THEM? TELL ME THE TRUTH OR ELSE...

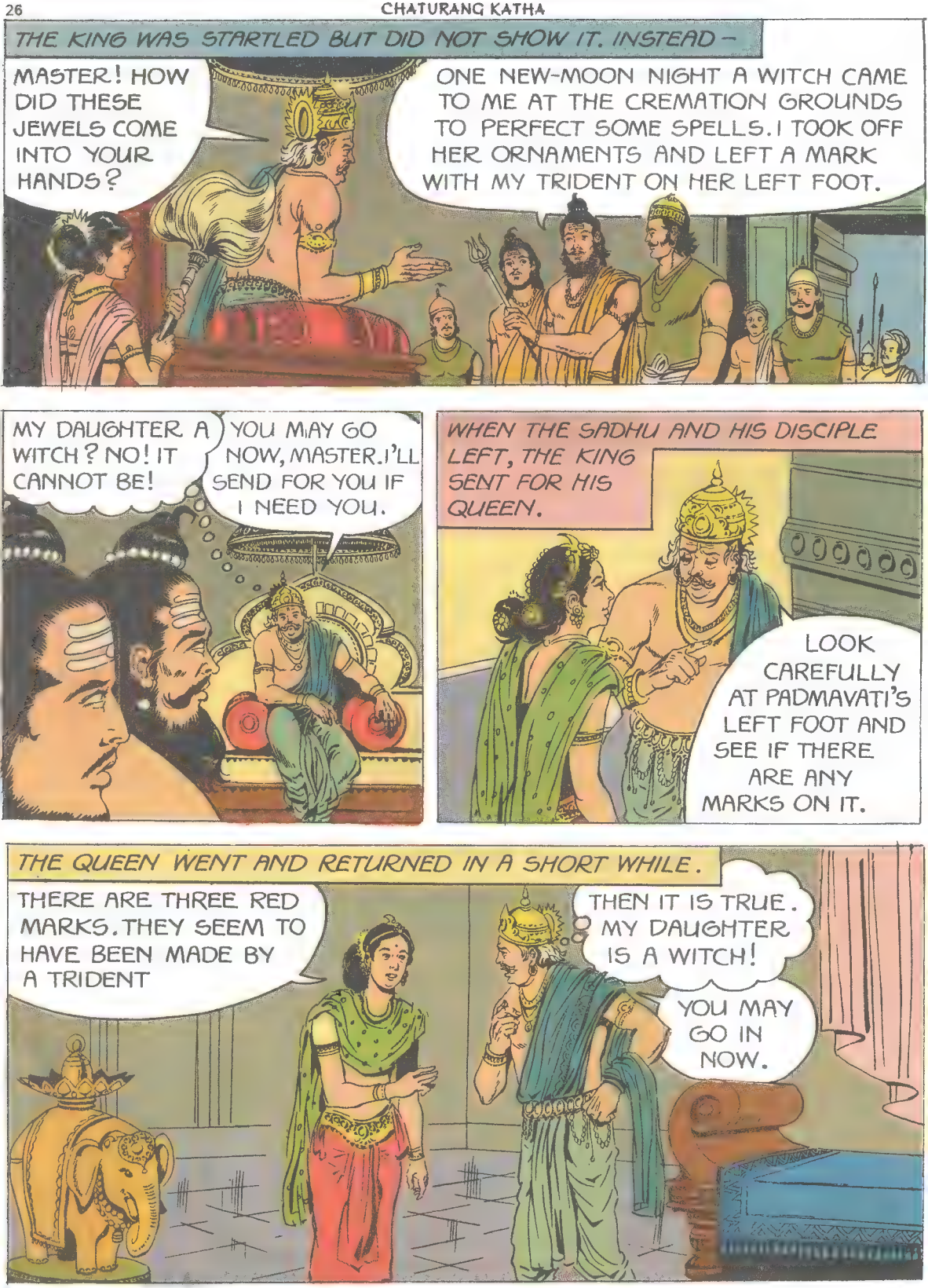


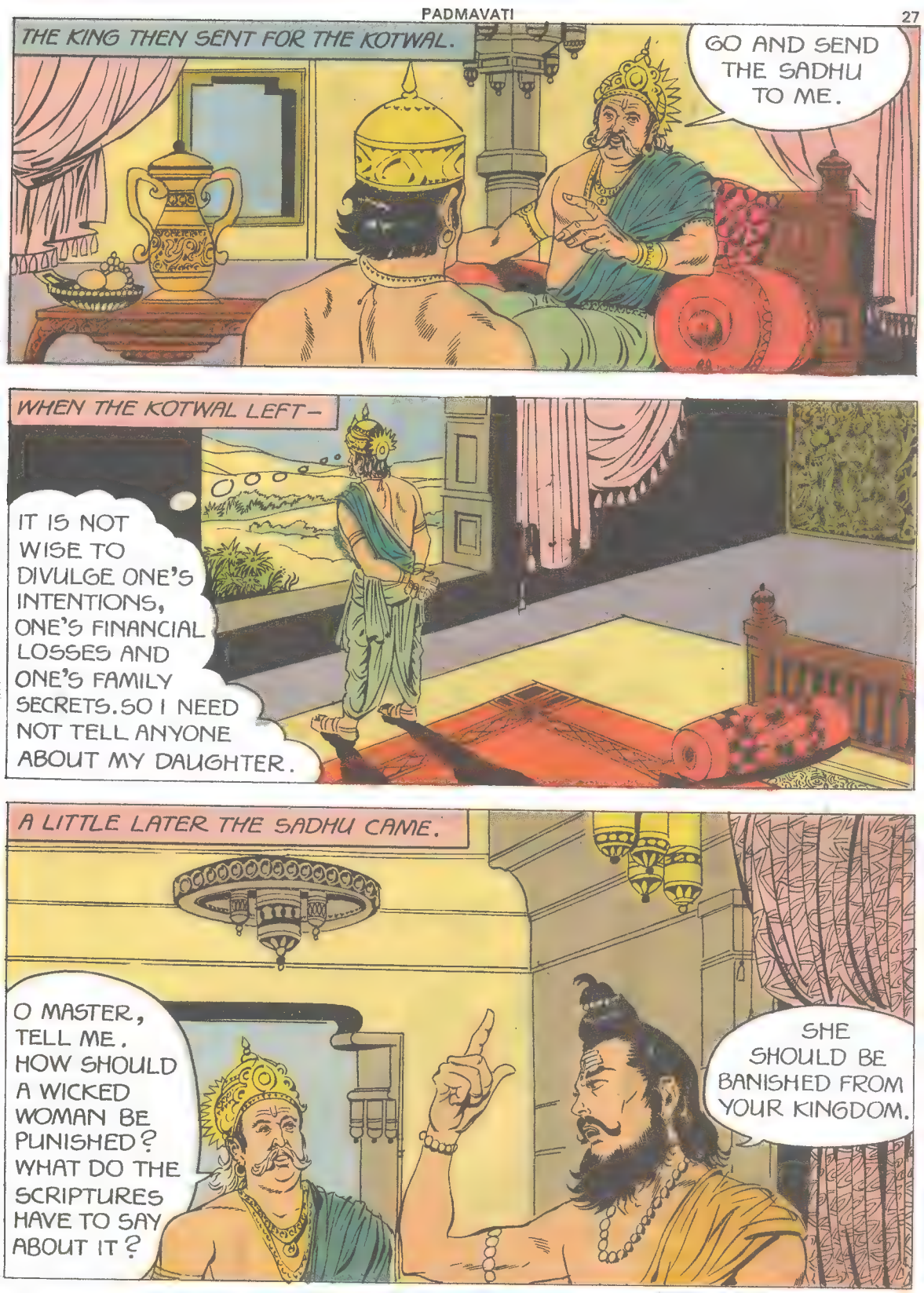


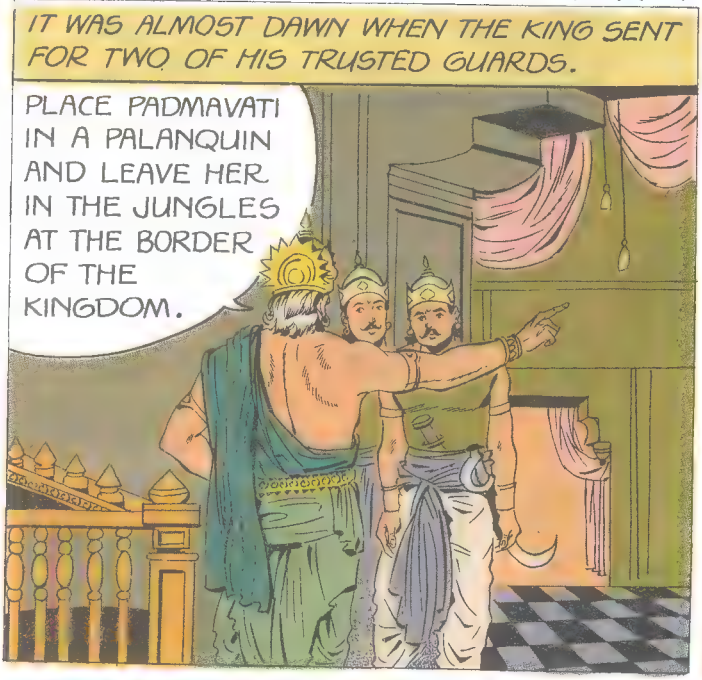




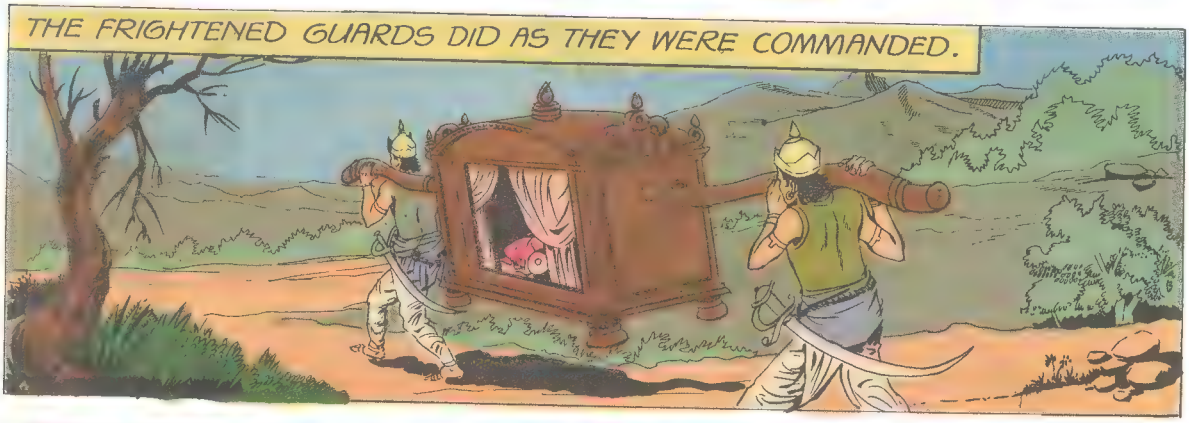
* AN OFFICER OF THE LAW.

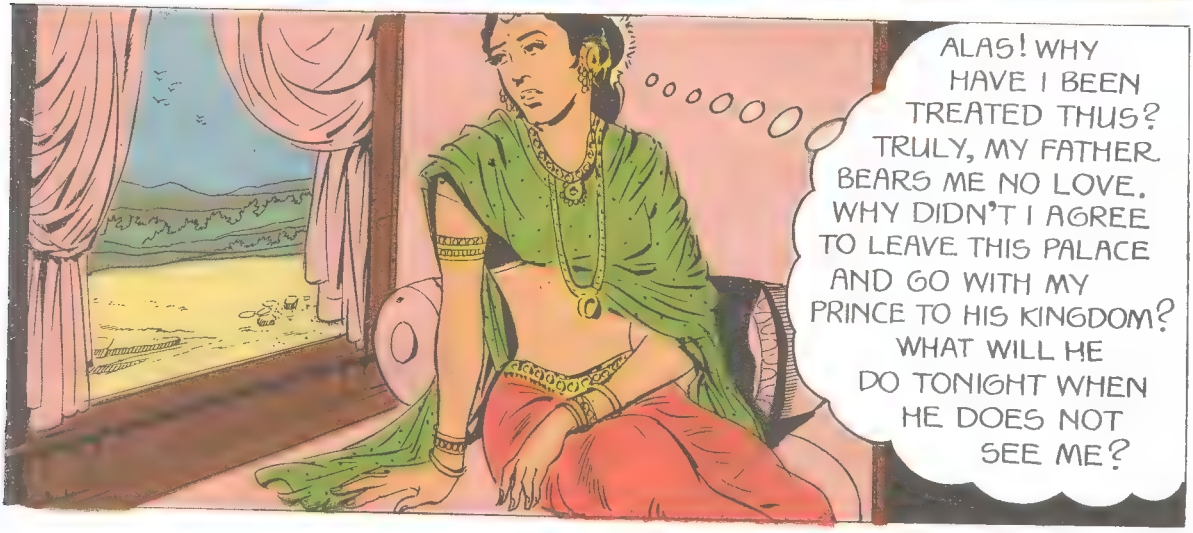

THE KING WAS STARTLED BUT DID NOT SHOW IT. INSTEAD –
MASTER! HOW DID THESE JEWELS COME INTO YOUR HANDS?
ONE NEW-MOON NIGHT A WITCH CAME TO ME AT THE CREMATION GROUNDS TO PERFECT SOME SPELLS. I TOOK OFF HER ORNAMENTS AND LEFT A MARK WITH MY TRIDENT ON HER LEFT FOOT.
MY DAUGHTER A WITCH? NO! IT CANNOT BE!
YOU MAY GO NOW, MASTER. I'LL SEND FOR YOU IF I NEED YOU.
WHEN THE SADHU AND HIS DISCIPLE LEFT, THE KING SENT FOR HIS QUEEN.
LOOK CAREFULLY AT PADMAVATI'S LEFT FOOT AND SEE IF THERE ARE ANY MARKS ON IT.
THE QUEEN WENT AND RETURNED IN A SHORT WHILE.
THERE ARE THREE RED MARKS. THEY SEEM TO HAVE BEEN MADE BY A TRIDENT
THEN IT IS TRUE. MY DAUGHTER IS A WITCH!
YOU MAY GO IN NOW.


THE KING THEN SENT FOR THE KOTWAL.
GO AND SEND THE SADHU TO ME.
WHEN THE KOTWAL LEFT–
IT IS NOT WISE TO DIVULGE ONE'S INTENTIONS, ONE'S FINANCIAL LOSSES AND ONE'S FAMILY SECRETS. SO I NEED NOT TELL ANYONE ABOUT MY DAUGHTER.
A LITTLE LATER THE SADHU CAME.
O MASTER, TELL ME. HOW SHOULD A WICKED WOMAN BE PUNISHED? WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES HAVE TO SAY ABOUT IT?
SHE SHOULD BE BANISHED FROM YOUR KINGDOM.

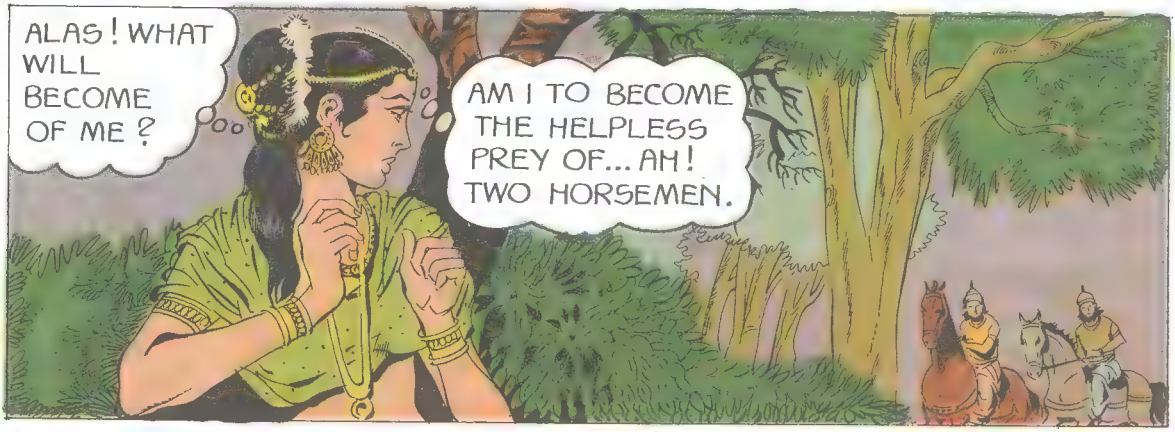

IT WAS ALMOST DAWN WHEN THE KING SENT FOR TWO OF HIS TRUSTED GUARDS.
PLACE PADMAVATI IN A PALANQUIN AND LEAVE HER IN THE JUNGLES AT THE BORDER OF THE KINGDOM.

THE GUARDS WERE AGHAST.
B...BUT YOUR MAJESTY... WH-WHAT HAS...
I WANT NO QUESTIONS ASKED. AND... NO ONE SHOULD LEARN OF THIS.

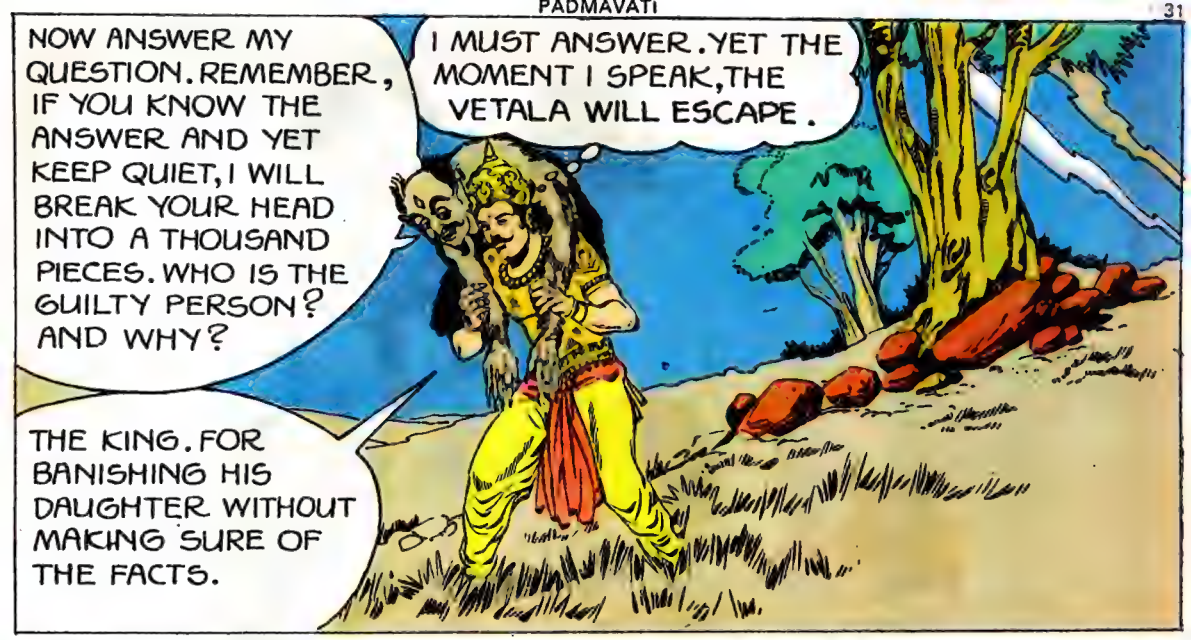

THE FRIGHTENED GUARDS DID AS THEY WERE COMMANDED.

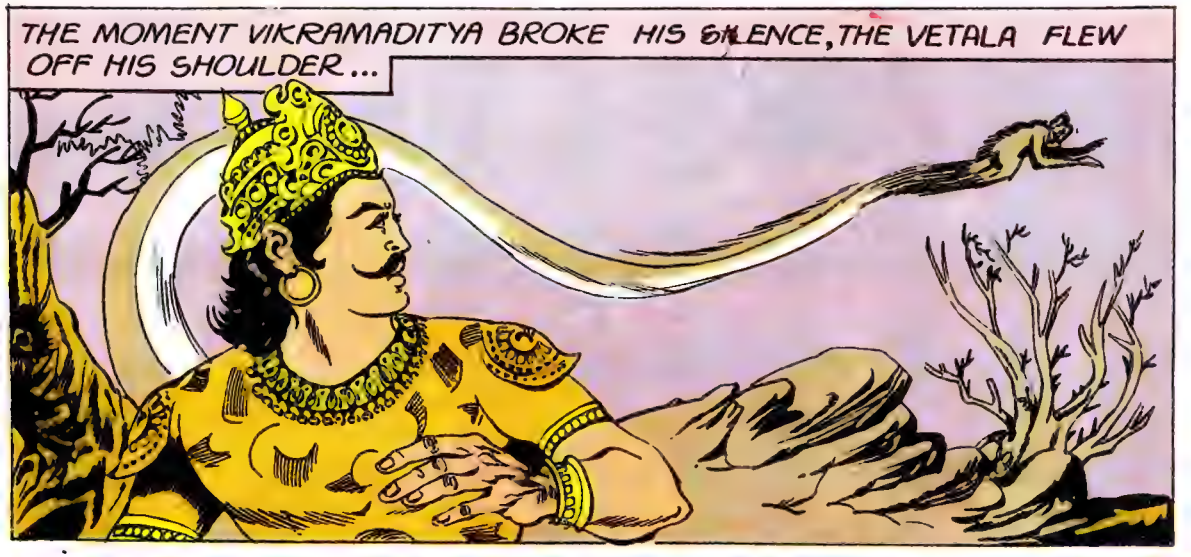

ALAS! WHY HAVE I BEEN TREATED THUS? TRULY, MY FATHER BEARS ME NO LOVE. WHY DIDN'T I AGREE TO LEAVE THIS PALACE AND GO WITH MY PRINCE TO HIS KINGDOM? WHAT WILL HE DO TONIGHT WHEN HE DOES NOT SEE ME?

BUT UNKNOWN TO PADMAVATI HER PRINCE AND HIS FRIEND, NOW IN THEIR OWN GARB, WERE FOLLOWING AT A SAFE DISTANCE.



WHEN THE HORSEMEN NEARED THE PALANQUIN-
PADMAVATI!
MY PRINCE!
STRANGE THINGS HAVE HAPPENED TO ME!
COME, LET US GO AWAY FROM THIS CRUEL KINGDOM TO THE WARMTH AND SHELTER OF MY OWN.
I WILL AGREE TO WHATEVER YOU SAY, MY PRINCE. YOU ARE MY ONLY REFUGE NOW.
VIKRAMADITYA REALIZED THAT THE STORY WAS COMING TO AN END.
THE PRINCE TOOK HER TO HIS KINGDOM AND LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER WITH HER.


NOW ANSWER MY QUESTION. REMEMBER, IF YOU KNOW THE ANSWER AND YET KEEP QUIET, I WILL BREAK YOUR HEAD INTO A THOUSAND PIECES. WHO IS THE GUILTY PERSON? AND WHY?
I MUST ANSWER. YET THE MOMENT I SPEAK, THE VETALA WILL ESCAPE.
THE KING. FOR BANISHING HIS DAUGHTER WITHOUT MAKING SURE OF THE FACTS.


THE MOMENT VIKRAMADITYA BROKE HIS SILENCE, THE VETALA FLEW OFF HIS SHOULDER...

...BACK TO THE TREE.
NEVER MIND, MY GOOD FELLOW. I WILL COME AFTER YOU AND TAKE YOU RIGHT BACK.

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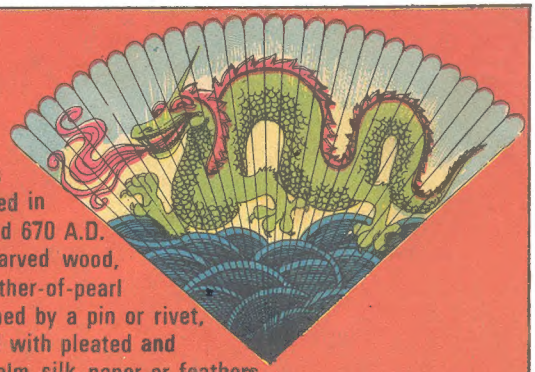
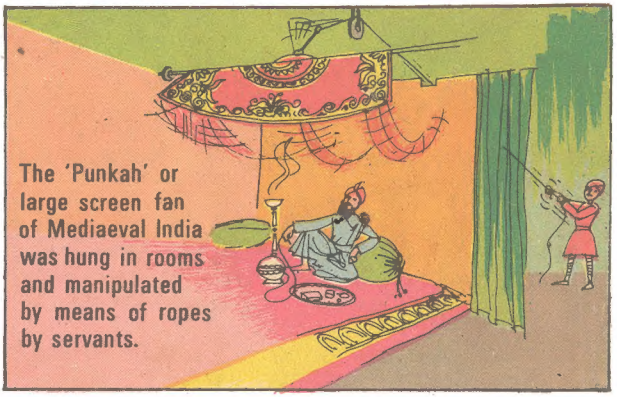
YOUR FAN HAS A 5000-YEAR OLD HISTORY

The first fans date back to 3000 B.C. The Chinese made them of dyed pheasant and peacock feathers mounted on a handle.



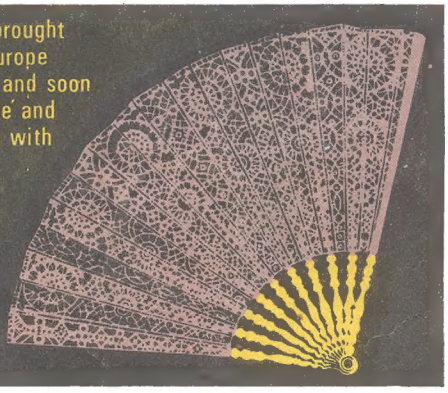
Folding fans were invented in Japan around 670 A.D. Blades of carved wood, ivory or mother-of-pearl were fastened by a pin or rivet, and covered with pleated and stretched palm, silk, paper or feathers.

In ancient India, elaborate fans were an important religious and civil emblem.

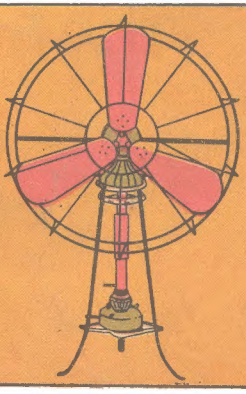


The 'Punkah' or large screen fan of Mediaeval India was hung in rooms and manipulated by means of ropes by servants.

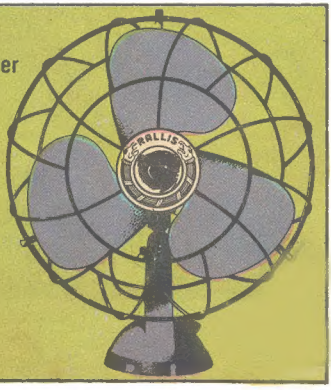
Portuguese traders brought the folding fan to Europe in the 16th century, and soon the carved ivory brise and ornate fans mounted with lace, parchment and painted skin were very popular.



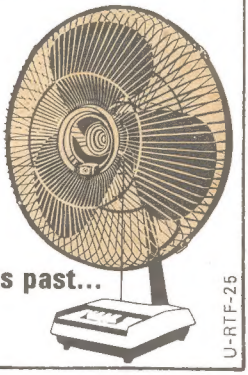
Modern industry brought the mechanical fans run on kerosene...



...and on electric power like the fans we use today.



India is the world's largest fan market and Rallifan is one of the leading brands—with table, ceiling, pedestal and exhaust models.



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